

Desolate Era

(莽荒纪)

Book 20

Jindan Upgrade

I Eat Tomatoes

(我吃西红柿)

Story Description:

Fate had never been kind to Ji Ning. Wracked by illnesses and infirm his entire life on Earth, Ning knew early on that he would die as a teenager. What he didn't know was that there really was such a thing as life after death, and that the multiverse was a far larger place than he thought. A lucky twist of fate (one of the few in Ning's life) meant that Ning was reborn into a world of Immortals and monsters, of Ki Refiners and powerful Fiendgods, a world where Dynasties lasted for millions of years. A world which is both greater...and yet also smaller...than he ever could imagine. He would have the opportunity to join them, and in this life, Ning swore to himself, he would never let himself be weak again! The Era he was born into was a Desolate one, but Ning would make it his era.

Original Story can be found here: [Link](#)

Chapter 1: Undermoon Lake

You win?!

Ji Ning instantly grew excited. When he first came up with this idea to butcher the Seamless Gate's forces until they lowered their heads, it had been a seemingly crazy, suicidal idea. Even Ning himself knew how dangerous his plan was, and how low the chances of success would be. However, he had no other options left to him; this was the only plan that was possible. Fortunately, thanks to the prisonworld, he had acquired the [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] evasive divine ability, which was why he had finally been able to render the Seamless Gate helpless before him.

"Release my wife." The Rahu-Ning stared intently at the black-robed Godking.

"Don't be impatient." The black-robed Godking looked back at Ning. "Let's have a chat first."

"Chat?" The Rahu-Ning said coldly, "No need to chat. So long as you release my wife, I'll immediately withdraw. Otherwise, I'll keep killing."

"Oh?" The black-robed Godking's voice turned cold. "You want to bring your wife back without paying any price at all? You are absolutely dreaming. So if I release Yu Wei, you'll stop acting against the Seamless Gate?"

The Rahu-Ning replied, "At least I won't continue attacking in this manner."

"Hah! Easily said, but once Yu Wei returns to your side, the Seamless Gate will have nothing to threaten you with. And, in the end, you are a member of the Nuwa Alliance. Our alliances are engaged in a war for survival, and both sides are struggling to seize any advantage possible. If your master Subhuti and the other supreme powers on your side ask you to act against us, would you really be able to refuse them?"

The black-robed Godking laughed coldly, "You've become powerful, which is why I said 'you win'; you've won a chance to negotiate with us."

In the past, my decision was that I would only allow you and Yu Wei to reunite if you joined us. Now, I'll no longer try to force you to join us. But you want to get her back without paying any price at all? Ahahaha...and once you and Yu Wei reunite and you launch more attacks against us, wouldn't the Seamless Gate become the laughing stock of the Three Realms?"

"I can swear an oath," Ning growled.

"Oath?" The black-robed Godking snickered. "True Gods and Daofathers can ignore oaths to the Dao of the Heavens. Given your current level of power, so long as your master is willing to assist you, you can withstand the punishment levied by the Heavenly Daos for violating an oath to them. Those oaths are meaningless."

Ning was silent.

It was true. Oaths to the Dao of the Heavens were useless against True Gods and Daofathers. The main reason for this was that there was a limit to the punishing power of the Heavenly Daos; the power behind it wasn't truly limitless.

"Either you pay a price to reunite with your wife, or we keep fighting like this. If worse comes to worse, I'll simply have all our Empyrean Gods and True Immortals withdraw, then come up with a different method to infiltrate the Three Realms." The Godking laughed coldly, "Although we spent quite a bit of blood, sweat, and effort building up those bases, we can still afford to lose them."

"Choose." The Godking looked at Ji Ning coldly.

Ji Ning looked back at the black-robed Godking. He was silent.

"It seems you aren't willing to pay any price at all. Very well." The black-robed Godking's voice turned even colder.

"Speak." Finally, Ning responded.

The Godking laughed. "That's more like it. Everything has to be fair. You were able to force the Seamless Gate to negotiate with you...you should feel proud. But for you to think that you'll get what you want

without paying any price at all is a bit delusional.”

“The Seamless Gate won’t ask too much of you. The evasion technique that you’ve acquire is quite formidable. The Seamless Gate will only ask one thing; that you hand this divine ability over to us. In addition, you have to guarantee that at least one of our major powers is capable of successfully training in it.”

“Impossible.” Ning laughed coldly. “You are dreaming.”

Was this a joke?

Subhuti had become incredibly excited when Ning had offered the Nuwa Alliance the evasion technique and the six bottles of chaos nectar. Clearly, this was something that would have a major impact on the war, far more so than the emergence of a new True God or Daofather. The Godking really was quite greedy; he actually dared to ask for a divine ability like this? In addition, the Godking had to know that training in this sort of divine ability had to be incredibly difficult, and so he insisted that Ning ensure at least one of their major powers could train in it.

“My request is very simple, but you won’t accept...” The Godking shook his head.

“It’s not that I won’t accept. It’s that I don’t have the ability to accept.” Ning shook his head and snarled, “It was my master who discovered this technique and bestowed it upon me. I’m forbidden from teaching it others. I cannot violate Master’s orders; if I do, he’d definitely kill me. What’s the difference between this ultimatum and your previous ultimatum of having me join the Seamless Gate?”

“Don’t even think about it. This divine ability is a supreme technique that belongs to the Nuwa Alliance, and it is extremely hard to train in. Although Master acquired it, not even he has been able to master it; to date, I’m the only one who has succeeded.” Ning laughed coldly. “As for you, you can forget about it. Even if you obtain it, you wouldn’t be able to train in it...and there’s no way you’ll obtain it.”

“You are the only one who has learned it?” The Godking asked.

“Yes.” Ning nodded.

After Subhuti had given the six bottles of chaos nectar to Suiren, he had once more informed Ning that Suiren training in the [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] was a major secret that absolutely could not be revealed. Given Suiren’s power, he would only begin to truly fight during the Endwar. When he suddenly revealed the [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] during the Endwar, he would catch the Seamless Gate offguard. By then, the Seamless Gate would realize that Ji Ning was lying...but it would be too late!

This wasn’t just the story they decided to tell the Seamless Gate. They would tell the same story to the other major powers of the Nuwa Alliance. The only ones who actually knew the truth, that Suiren had trained in the [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] evasion technique, were Subhuti, Daoist Three Purities, Shennong, and the other overlord-level Daofathers.

The Godking felt rather suspicious. Could it be that Ji Ning truly was the only one who had mastered it? Still, he also knew that it was true that a divine ability like this had to be extremely hard to train in. The number of people who could learn it in the entire Three Realms could probably be counted on one hand. It was possible that what Ji Ning said was the truth. The Godking still clung on to a sliver of hope...but he also knew that it was very likely that there was no hope for him to acquire this technique from the Nuwa Alliance.

In truth, his request for the [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] was a bargaining tactic; he had never expected it to succeed.

“Fine. I won’t try to force things with the evasion technique.” The black-robed Godking looked at Ning. “I need three treasures.”

“Speak.” Ning looked at him.

“The first treasure is known as the ‘Seven Treasures Azure Sunfiend’. I don’t need too much of it, just five kilograms!” The black-robed Godking looked at Ning. “The second treasure is known as the ‘Bloodflower Pith’; I only need five kilograms of this as well.”

Ning just listened silently.

Three treasures?

Although these two treasures were rare and costly, the Nuwa Alliance had them. He could use treasures to trade for them. Although five kilograms of each would be quite costly, it wouldn't be too burdensome to Ning. However, based on what Ning knew of the Seamless Gate's Godking, he knew that matters wouldn't be that simple.

"The third treasure...is an Iceheart Leaf." The black-robed Godking stared intently at Ning.

"Iceheart Leaf?" The Rahu-Ning growled, "Are you referring to the Iceheart Leaves of Undermoon Lake?"

"Yes." The black-robed Godking looked at Ning.

The Rahu-Ning bellowed, "Are you trying to get me to commit suicide?"

The vast, infinite primordial chaos contained many unexplored, marvelous places.

In previous eras, when everything was peaceful, the major powers loved to wander through the primordial chaos and explore it. Many treasures and ingredients could only be found within the primordial chaos, and it also contained some truly lethal areas. Daofather Fujū had silently, soundlessly died within the primordial chaos, while Daoist Three Purities had discovered the nine chaos seals. In short, the primordial chaos was filled with both great danger and great opportunity.

As for 'Undermoon Lake', this was an extremely dangerous location.

Undermoon Lake was a deep lake that existed within the primordial chaos. It was adjacent to an enormous star, and the surface of the lake just so happened to face the star. The star was reflected off the lake, much like the image of a moon being reflected in water. It was extraordinarily beautiful, and thus it was named Undermoon Lake. However, Undermoon Lake was an incredibly mysterious place. Only Empyrean Gods could enter it! During the Primordial Era, Empyrean Gods would often enter it, as they felt certain that there had to be a tremendous karmic fortune waiting for them within it. For the sake of acquiring that

fortune, the Empyrean Gods were willing to take the risk. But...upon entering, none of them ever returned.

It wasn't until the era of the Three Realms that an Empyrean God known as Bodhisattva Jueming managed to return alive. He had entered during the Primordial Era, but only managed to leave during the era of the Three Realms.

After he came out, his only explanation was that the lake contained tremendous danger, as well as many precious chaos items. He returned with a total of three treasures, one of them being the Iceheart Leaf. He had always been tremendously powerful, and when he returned to the Three Realms he had already been at the peak of power possible for an Empyrean God. By now, after so many years of cultivation, he had broken through to become one of the Buddhas of the Buddhist Sangha.

"I only need a single Iceheart Leaf." The black-robed Godking looked at Ning. "Jueming brought back a total of twelve of those leaves."

"But Buddha Jueming has been the only one to return in countless years," Ning said angrily. "An enormous number of Empyrean Gods have entered, including quite a few who belong to your Seamless Gate. Which one has ever come out again? If I was to die inside, you would be quite happy, wouldn't you? Alternately, if I was to be trapped inside for countless years before emerging, this entire storm might have already passed, right?"

"Right." The Godking stared steadily at Ning. "You are quite clever. I know you have a Primaltwin. When your true body goes into the lake, your Primaltwin can continue to remain in the Three Realms, and so you won't truly die. In addition, it's always possible that you'll successfully leave from Undermoon Lake. In terms of power, you are after all far stronger than Jueming was at the time."

"I'm only asking you to send your true body inside, and there's a chance you'll be able to come back. This, in exchange for Yu Wei being returned to you. You should feel satisfied." The Godking looked towards Ning. "The Seamless Gate insists on acquiring these three treasures."

Ning looked back at the Godking. In his heart, however, he was laughing coldly.

The Seamless Gate's scheme was really something. If his true body entered Undermoon Lake, the Seamless Gate would no longer be worried about Ning launching more ambushes. What the Seamless Gate didn't realize...was that Ning had a total of eighteen 'true bodies'!

"The Buddhist Sangha has long ago used up those twelve Iceheart Leaves." The black-robed Godking looked at Ning. "You'll only be able to acquire more within Undermoon Lake. If you accept, I'll immediately release Yu Wei from the Infinity Hells, and I'll even let you meet with her. Once you bring me all three treasures, you can take your wife back."

Ning was silent for a moment. Finally, he answered. "Fine."

The Godking laughed.

Given how much Ji Ning cared for Yu Wei, the Godking knew that he would accept. He was only asking Ji Ning to take on some danger, after all, not to join their side. Even when Ji Ning had been weak, he had been willing to risk his life to ambush and attack the Seamless Gate; clearly, he was willing to take on risks for Yu Wei's sake.

And it was true that the Seamless Gate was in urgent need of these three treasures. They would either be able to acquire the treasures or perpetually trap Ji Ning within Undermoon Lake.

"Hahaha...I'll immediately make the arrangements for you to meet with your wife." The Godking laughed.

Chapter 2: Long Time No See

The Voidboat floated downwards past the turbid waters of a river.

A white-robed youth was seated alone atop the boat. As for the 90,000 Celestial Immortals and 8 million Loose Immortals he commanded, he had sent them all back into the Starseizer world. So long as he was in the Rahu-Ning mode, the Godking of the Seamless Gate would be unable to draw him into the dreamworld.

Whoosh.

A figure suddenly appeared out of nowhere atop the Voidboat.

“Master.” Ning hurriedly rose to his feet.

“How did it go?” Subhuti looked at Ning. He was very concerned about this disciple of his. Ning had risked utter calamity when he had first launched these dangerous attacks against the Seamless Gate. From the very start, Subhuti understood how important Yu Wei was to him, and was worried that the Seamless Gate would make use of that to set a trap for him.

“What did the Godking of the Seamless Gate say to you?” Subhuti immediately asked. The Godking had used a technique to ensure that no one was able to spy upon his conversation with Ning. “Given my understanding of his devious disposition, there’s no way he would simply hand Yu Wei over to you. He must have listed certain preconditions...and those preconditions may very well be deadly traps!”

Subhuti was very worried about him.

“You are right,” Ning replied. “The Godking did indeed list certain preconditions. He wants me to give him three treasures in exchange for her.”

“Three treasures? Which three?” Subhuti immediately asked.

“Five kilograms of ‘Seven Treasures Azure Sunfiend’, five kilograms of ‘Bloodflower Pith’, and a single Iceheart Leaf.”

A murderous look appeared in Subhuti's eyes. "The first two aren't that hard to acquire; they are ingredients used to produce Great Firmament pills. I have plenty of them, and I can easily bring out five hundred kilograms. I myself can handle the first two requests. But Iceheart Leaf... it no longer exists within the Three Realms. The twelve leaves that were originally acquired were used up long ago. They want to force you into Undermoon Lake!"

Great Firmament pills were the very best Immortal pills, capable of replenishing power for Daofathers.

In the Endwar, all the Daofathers would use up enormous amounts of energy in battle, and so both sides needed to store up large amounts of Great Firmament pills! Ning was merely an Empyrean God and True Immortal, after all, and so the Seamless Gate didn't request an excessively exorbitant amount of materials for making them.

"These three treasures are indeed somewhat useful for the Seamless Gate, but even if you gave them these items it wouldn't have much of an impact on the overall situation." Subhuti laughed coldly. "Their goal is to force you into Undermoon Lake! The ideal outcome for them is you dying inside that place. Even if you don't die, you might be trapped there for countless years. Even if you manage to leave, the war would have long since ended, with you having caused no impact on the Endwar at all."

"Ever since the Primordial Era, the only one who has ever survived to return was Buddha Jueming, but he was trapped there for countless years as well. What a fine plan. What a fine ploy!" Subhuti looked at Ning. "You have to be careful. I know you wish to rescue your wife, but your own life is even more important. Don't forget that you have a daughter to take care of."

"Yes," Ning assented respectfully.

Subhuti just sighed to himself.

Some cultivators would go so far as to kill their own parents or spouse so as to strengthen their Dao-hearts! They would place their own cultivation in a position of paramount importance; everything else could

be discarded. In the Three Realms, there were quite a few such figures who were completely focused on the Dao and were willing to sacrifice everything else. However, his disciple Ji Ning was a person who viewed relationships as being tremendously important.

“Houyi, all those years ago, was just like how Ji Ning is. Both of them care deeply about relationships. Can it be that this is necessary in order for one to be accomplished in heartforce?” Subhuti still felt fairly unconcerned, relatively speaking. “The Seamless Gate’s calculations are off. They want to use Undermoon Lake to trap or kill Ji Ning, but they don’t know that he has a total of 18 bodies. Even if one dies within Undermoon Lake, it won’t have much of an impact on him.”

“Hmph. Today, they are using love to manipulate my disciple. In the future...” A murderous intent began to rise within Subhuti’s heart.

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After his master left, Ning continued to sit there in the lotus position within his Voidboat. He allowed the Godking’s invisible energy to infiltrate his mind, guiding his senses downwards. He remained conscious, but part of his mind had been drawn into the dreamworld.

Within the vast, dark dreamworld.

The Godking, seated atop his towering throne, stared downwards at the newly-appeared Ji Ning.

“Right after our negotiations concluded, your master sought you out. It seems he really does care about you quite a bit.” The Godking looked at Ning, then laughed coldly. “Have you changed your mind? If you’ve changed your mind, we can keep fighting. But of course, your senior apprentice-sister will continue to suffer endless torment within the Infinity Hells...”

To force Ji Ning to enter Undermoon Lake was the best idea the Godking had come up with. Ideally, Ji Ning would die, but even if he didn’t die he would still be trapped there.

His only worry was that Subhuti would dissuade Ning, causing him to

change his mind.

“Don’t worry. I’ll go to Undermoon Lake.” Ning looked at the Godking. “Hurry up and release her.”

“Hahaha.” The Godking let out a secret sigh of relief. “Don’t worry. I’ll release Yu Wei right now.”

Whoosh.

Ning suddenly sensed a ripple next to him. Turning his head, he saw that upon a distant meadow the figure of an incredibly beautiful black-robed maiden had appeared. This peerless beauty had a rather glazed look in her eyes; clearly, the torment she had endured in the Infinity Hells had nearly broken her. Fortunately, the Godking had been in control of things; otherwise, her soul would’ve shattered long ago.

But upon seeing her in such a state, Ning still felt pain in his heart.

“This wife of yours has only spent a mere century in the flame hell,” the Godking said calmly. “According to my original plans, I was going to have her spend a thousand years in each of the hells. Your wife has only gotten a taste of the first hell...but alas, you’ve forced us to compromise with you. I have to say, I feel some admiration for you.”

Ning didn’t respond to the Godking. ‘Flame hell’? He still remembered how, when he made the choice all those years ago during the Realmwar, he had watched as Yu Wei was sent to suffer an agonizing set of torture by fire. So during the past century...she had been continuously suffering that agony.

Yu Wei slowly came back to her senses. After suffering a century within the Infinity Hells, she had already somewhat lost control of her senses. Her soul was simply too weak. Only after her torment had finally halted did she slowly come back to her senses. In front of her, off in the distance, stood a white-robed youth. A white-robed youth who seemed to have unshed tears glimmering in his eyes...

“Junior apprentice-brother.” This was the first time Yu Wei had spoken in a century.

“Senior apprentice-sister.” Ning’s body blurred, then reappeared next to her. He took Yu Wei by the hand.

Their gazes met.

Ning held Yu Wei in his arms. He could sense the warmth, her warmth, emanating from her body. “Senior apprentice-sister. I’m sorry.” It had been his choice that had consigned her into the Infinity Hells.

“It was I who wronged you.” Yu Wei smiled into Ning’s embrace. “When I destroyed Shennong’s medicine, I knew that it would be impossible for me to make up for the harm I caused you. I couldn’t even face you. I thought that perhaps death would be the best outcome.”

“It wasn’t your fault. Wasn’t your fault.” Ning said, “The Godking is the disciple of the Lord of the Demonheart; he’s skilled in mesmerizing the hearts of others. In your past life, you suffered too much and so the demon in your heart became incredibly powerful, giving him a chance to bewilder you...”

Yu Wei nodded gently.

She had become completely clear-minded now. When she had shattered Shennong’s medicine, her soul had been shattered as well. The Godking had hurried after her, dragging her truesoul back, then sending it to be reborn into a new, weak soul. That weak soul, however, no longer had any soul-imprints on it, and the Godking no longer spent any effort in mesmerizing her a second time. After all, there was no point to doing so when she was going to be in the Infinity Hells.

With the soul imprint gone, the century of burning agony she had experienced caused her to see things even more clearly.

“I’m actually quite content. Ordinary mortals only live for a single century. I’ve lived a very, very long life in my previous life and in this life, and I even met you. We even had a daughter together, Brightmoon. It’s enough.” Yu Wei said consolingly, “I did wrong by you, junior apprentice-brother.”

“Hahaha...”

The Godking, seated upon his massive throne, laughed as he stared downwards towards them. "What a fine pair of Immortal lovers. Even I feel a bit moved by you two. Yu Wei, do you know? For your sake, this Dao-companion of yours used his own strength to cause major disturbances to my Seamless Gate's disposition of forces throughout the entire Three Realms. He forced me, the exalted Godking, to bow my head and to negotiate with him. Haha...from this day forth, Yu Wei, you will no longer need to enter the Infinity Hells. You can live a peaceful, joyful life. Once your Dao-companion, Ji Ning, returns with those three treasures I've asked for, you'll regain your freedom. You will be allowed to reunite with Ji Ning and your daughter."

The two distant embracing figures suddenly let go of each other. Yu Wei stared at Ji Ning. She asked hurriedly, "Junior apprentice-brother, three treasures? Don't trust the Godking. He's skilled in manipulation and lies. There has to be a plot behind it." After having recovered from her own beguiling, Yu Wei knew very well how terrifying the Godking could be.

"I know exactly what the Godking is scheming." Ning looked at Yu Wei. "Don't worry. Have faith in me."

"Yes, Yu Wei, you should have faith in this junior apprentice-brother of yours. He's become quite a noteworthy character in the Three Realms. Perhaps, towards the end of this great storm, he'll break through to become a True God or Daofather and end up fighting against me during the Endwar. These three treasures won't pose much of a threat to him." The Godking looked down upon her as he spoke.

"Junior apprentice-brother." Yu Wei looked at Ning, extremely worried. "Brightmoon. You have to take care of Brightmoon and protect her. It's not worth it to risk yourself for me."

Ning just held Yu Wei in his arms. "Enough. Don't say anything else. I've already made up my mind." His voice was very soft, but it was very determined.

His wife in his arms, he felt extremely calm, peaceful, and warm inside.

This sort of feeling...it had been so long!

If he was to remain alive but be like an emotionless walking zombie, life would be worse than death.

For the sake of this sort of warmth...even death would be worth it.

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Seated atop the Voidboat, Ning opened his eyes. When he thought of how his family would be reunited once he emerged from Undermoon Lake, he felt filled with strength and resolve! Yu Wei had already been placed by the Godking into a minor world-estate; she was no longer suffering any torment and was going to live a blissful, peaceful life.

Ning felt much better now. During the past century, he had spent almost every day training in sword-arts as well as frantically trying to search for treasures within the prisonworld to help him grow stronger, eventually acquiring the [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent]. Despite that... deep in his heart, he felt a pain that would never go away. This was because he knew that his wife was suffering torment within the Infinity Hells.

After acquiring the [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] evasion technique, he had been absolutely ecstatic. This was because...he finally saw hope. Hope of rescuing her.

“Soon, senior apprentice-sister...soon, we’ll be reunited for good. I’ll definitely return from Undermoon Lake.” Ning immediately boarded the Voidboat, leaving this major world.

Within the endless Void.

As soon as the Voidboat appeared within the Void, a terrifying ripple of power suddenly descended. Shocked, Ning immediately used the [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] technique to flee at high speed, but a voice suddenly spoke out within Ning’s mind. “Don’t panic, my young friend Ji Ning.”

Chapter 3: Demanding the Technique

However, Ji Ning didn't slow down in the slightest. With a swish, he moved hundreds of thousands of kilometers away while spreading out his heartforce, taking a close look at the major power who had just arrived.

"No need to panic." A warm, gentle laugh rang out.

As Ning dodged past the man, his heartforce completed the scan. The newcomer was dressed in Daoist robes; it was a very authentic-looking white-bearded Daoist.

"Him?" Ning was secretly surprised. "I knew that my display of the [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] would arouse the attention of some major powers. I'm not worried about the Seamless Gate; it's the ones on our side that are more troublesome. So the first one to appear is Daoist Yu Qiu. His nickname 'Ascetic' is quite fitting; he really is quite shameless."

Some True Gods and Daofathers were vile, vicious demons. Others were crafty, unscrupulous, petty figures.

Daoist Yu Qiu was one of the most classic examples of the latter.

His avariciousness and craftiness was legendary, and so the major powers of the Three Realms all referred to him as the 'Ascetic'; clearly, this was a title given to mock him! However, given that he had become a Daofather, his Dao-heart wouldn't possibly be shaken by a bit of mere mockery, and he continued to act as he pleased.

Many of the major powers of the Nuwa Alliance had been intrigued after Ning had displayed his [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent], with the evil ones becoming especially greedy for it. However, because so many people were watching, and because Ning was a member of their alliance, everyone continued to hesitate. No one wanted to be the first to act.

And so, Daoist Yu Qiu became the first.

"Greetings, senior Yu Qiu," Ning said respectfully.

"No need for such courtesy. I have quite a close relationship with your master, Subhuti. As for your other master, Daoist Threelives, we were

lifelong bosom friends. We were like brothers,” Daoist Yu Qiu said with a merry laugh.

Ning instantly became speechless.

Subhuti held Daoist Yu Qiu in disdain; the number of times they had met could probably be counted on one hand. To stretch that into a so-called ‘close relationship’? Fine. As for Daoist Threelives, over the course of his battles for supremacy during the Primordial Era, he had made friends with many of the other major powers. He had merely been on courteous terms with Daoist Yu Qiu. For that sort of lukewarm relationship to be described as ‘lifelong bosom friends’ and ‘like brothers’ by Daoist Yu Qiu was...

“I heard that old Threelives finally found a successor. I’m delighted for him. Alas...” Daoist Yu Qiu let out a sigh. “A pity that in that battle, my old brother Threelives ended up dying in the fight. I still regret it to this very day.”

“Fortunately, he has a disciple like you now.” Daoist Yu Qiu laughed and nodded. “Just now, I saw you use an evasion technique that involved riding a Ninehorn Lightning Serpent. Now that the storm has descended upon us, if the major powers of our alliance were to learn this technique, we would have a much better chance of surviving. Ji Ning, would you be willing to let me take a look at this evasion technique?”

Ning had been given orders by his master Subhuti long ago. He immediately said, “Senior, this evasion technique was accidentally acquired by my master, Subhuti. Although he’s transmitted it to me, he’s strictly ordered me not to teach it to any others. As his disciple, I wouldn’t dare to disobey my master’s orders. If you wish to learn this evasion technique, senior, you can go and speak to my master about it.”

Daoist Yu Qiu frowned slightly. Seek out Subhuti?

Subhuti’s status was close to that of the likes of the Human Sovereigns and the leaders of the Daoist Path and the Buddhist Sangha. His mastery over spacetime was number one in the Three Realms. If he wanted to avoid someone, that person would never be able to find him.

“It’s just an evasion technique.” Daoist Yu Qiu’s face sank. “This matter involves all the major powers of our side, as well as the storm that we are facing. Can it be that Subhuti is trying to hoard it for himself?”

Whoosh!

Yet another aura of power and majesty descended, and the Void began to crackle with bolts of lightning. This aura was a familiar one. Ning’s heart clenched. This familiar aura...it belonged to Exalted Celestial Thundergod, who he had once paid a visit to.

The Void split apart, and a muscular, black-armored man came walking out from it. His eyes brimmed with sparks of lightning, and as he walked forward Ning felt as though the entire Void itself was rendered breathless. If Daoist Yu Qiu was merely an ordinary Daofather, Exalted Celestial Thundergod was a top-tier Daofather.

“Thundergod.” Daoist Yu Qiu smiled at him.

For once, Thundergod gave him a nod, showing him some face. This time, they were standing on the same side, after all.

“Ji Ning.” Thundergod’s face was as cold as ever. “Daoist Yu Qiu’s words are correct. This matter has an impact on the war and involves the lives of countless living creatures on our side. You had best hurry up and hand this divine ability over.”

“Master’s orders are...”

As soon as Ning spoke, Thundergod frowned and barked, “If your master has given you orders and you aren’t qualified to decide on your own, then have your master come out! You are his disciple; you definitely must have a method that you can use to notify him. Go summon your master right now. Have him come over here.”

It was true. Subhuti had indeed given Ning a message-talisman. As for the other major powers? Aside from the few who were on very close terms with Subhuti, they weren’t able to simply go meet with him when they wanted to.

Whoosh.

A vortex suddenly appeared in the Void, with a robed elder walking out from it.

Daofather Subhuti had been paying close attention the entire time. He knew very well that sooner or later, a major power would jump out to speak to Ning. He had been quite calm when Daoist Yu Qiu had emerged, but once Exalted Celestial Thundergod also emerged, Subhuti knew that things had become a bit troublesome. This was because Daoist Yu Qiu was weak; he wouldn't really dare to offend Subhuti. Thundergod, however, was an extremely powerful person with an incredibly violent and stubborn temper. He often wouldn't even give face to the two leaders of the Buddhist Sangha and the Daoist Path. He was also the most highly skilled lightning expert in the Three Realms; he definitely would feel deep desire towards the [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] technique.

"Thundergod." Subhuti appeared before them.

"Respectful greetings, Subhuti," the smiling Daoist Yu Qiu hurriedly said.

Thundergod looked at Subhuti. He growled, "Subhuti. This evasion technique...I think you had best hand it over."

"Hmph." Subhuti normally had a calm smile on his face, but his face was calm and cold right now. "I worked hard to acquire that technique. It's my decision as to who I wish to teach it to. What, do you want to try and force it out of me? Is there now a new rule that all the major powers have to offer up all of the techniques they have at their disposal? Why haven't I heard about this rule?"

Thundergod was momentarily speechless. The supreme techniques which each major power used to roam the Three Realms were generally not taught to outsiders. For example, there was no way Daoist Three Purities would teach anyone else his 'Immortal Slaying Sword Formation'. And, in truth, even if he was willing to teach it to someone else, no one else would be able to successfully learn it, as they wouldn't have the four Chaos-level swords.

However, even though no one else could master the technique, once

others completely understood it, it would be much easier for them to deal with it.

Similarly, Subhuti's special skills involving spacetime would only be taught to Redsnow. No major powers would say anything about it, nor would they try to force the spacetime technique out of Subhuti or the Immortal Slaying Sword Formation out of Daoist Three Purities. This was because every major power had their own path of Immortal cultivation; they couldn't split their attention and focus on something else. Thus, they didn't feel too much desire for other top-tier techniques.

However, Ji Ning's [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] evasion technique was different. It was a divine ability; anybody could use it upon learning it!

"This divine ability will be of tremendous use to the other major powers on our side," Thundergod said angrily. "This is a matter which has implications for the lives of countless people on our side. Don't you think you should hand it over?"

"It's not that I'm unwilling to. Of course I care about this war! That's why I offered it up long ago." Subhuti suddenly let out a sigh. "The Buddhist Sangha, the Daoist Path, and the Sovereigns of Mankind have already acquired copies of this technique. Fuxi, Shennong, Suiren, and the two leaders of Buddhism and Daoism each have a copy, but none of them have been able to master it yet."

"What?!"

Daoist Yu Qiu, Exalted Celestial Thundergod, and the many major powers who had sent their coresense to watch this location were all shocked.

There were many major powers who were paying attention to this place. Most of the major powers of the Nuwa Alliance had sent their coresense to keep watch here, covering the entire region! In fact, they were all prepared to appear at any moment. As for the major powers of the Seamless Gate...they wanted to scan this place as well, but Subhuti, Daoist Three Purities, and the others had long ago joined together to completely seal the area off from the Seamless Gate's forces, preventing

their coresenses from entering it.

This seal allowed their allies in but completely blocked their enemies out.

“If such an unearthly divine ability could be easily learned by all major powers, our side would be guaranteed to win.” Subhuti shook his head and sighed. “Tell me, do you really think that this divine ability is an easy one to learn?”

Thundergod muttered, “Why don’t you transmit copies of it to all the major powers on our side? Perhaps one of us will be able to master it.”

“There’s no rush.” Subhuti shook his head. “It isn’t as though you don’t know how terrifying the spy network of the Seamless Gate is. Over the years, we’ve found quite a few Seamless Gate spies amongst our ranks; in fact, even one of the major powers on our side was revealed to be a spy. It is entirely possible that there are other spies amongst the major powers as well. We have to be careful, be cautious. Otherwise...once the spy procures this technique, the Seamless Gate will have access to it. If the supreme powers on their side learn it, that would be disastrous.”

Thundergod was stunned yet again. Indeed, the Seamless Gate’s network of spies was very formidable. The Empyrean Gods and True Immortals would never be discovered until they themselves chose to reveal themselves. The only reason why the Nuwa Alliance found out about the likes of Sword Immortal Evergreen was when they suddenly engaged in acts of betrayal at a crucial moment.

Suddenly...

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

One figure after another began to materialize out of nowhere. Some were tall and muscular, some were as ephemeral as the clouds, some were filled with murderous auras, some seemed to be as cold as glaciers. Incarnations of one True God or Daofather after another began to form.

After this group manifested, more and more True Gods and Daofathers began to send their incarnations to this place. Clearly, everyone wanted to

discuss this manner.

From Subhuti's words, they understood that their most supreme leaders such as Suiren and Daoist Three Purities were hesitating on what to do, due to their concerns over potential spies.

"Good heavens..." Ning could barely breathe. To see so many True Gods and Daofathers together was an incredibly rare occurrence.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

Five supremely powerful auras suddenly descended together.

Shennong. Fuxi. Suiren. Lord Tathagata the Buddha. Daoist Three Purities. They, too, only sent incarnations over.

"Eighty-two True Gods and Daofathers." Ning was secretly shocked. "However...not everyone has arrived. My eldest apprentice-brother and second apprentice-brother have yet to arrive."

"I feel that Subhuti's words are correct." A distant, headless Fiendgod, Xing Tian, spoke out. "This divine ability was discovered by fellow Daoist Subhuti. It is completely his choice as to whether or not he should offer it up, and he's already chosen to act on all of our behalfs. The Three Sovereigns of Mankind and the two leaders of Daoism and Buddhism cannot possibly be spies. As for other major powers...it is best to be a bit more cautious. Training in a divine ability like this must be incredibly difficult. I don't wish to see all of us fail in learning it, only for it to be acquired by the Seamless Gate and someone on their side mastering it. That would be a nightmare."

"Agreed. We can't be hasty," Lu Dongbin concurred.

There were actually many major powers who were supportive of Subhuti's decision. This was primarily because the five mighty overlords were all standing alongside Subhuti. Their influence and power was simply tremendous.

Thundergod began to grow frantic. Although many of the major powers here wanted this divine ability, most of them would follow the lead of the five mighty overlords. In addition, the chance that they would be able to

actually succeed in mastering this divine ability was miniscule. Ninehorn Lightning Serpents weren't so easily tamed, after all. Thundergod, however, felt that he had a much better chance than the rest of them.

“I was born from the primordial chaos as one of the eighty-one original True Gods.” Thundergod could no longer hold himself back, and he immediately spoke out in a thunderous voice that echoed within the Void. “There's no way that I could possibly be willing to become a spy for the Seamless Gate. In addition, in terms of control over lightning, I am the number one expert in the entire Three Realms. I'm also extremely familiar with Ninehorn Lightning Serpents. There's a very high chance that I will be able to master this divine ability. Sovereigns of Mankind, Tathagata, Three Purities...can it be that all of you believe that I, Thundergod, am not able to learn this divine ability?”

Chapter 4: Icefire Jindan Smelting

Daoist Three Purities' eyes had been shut this entire time. Suddenly, they opened up slightly, his sword-like gaze landing upon Exalted Celestial Thundergod. "Thundergod, this isn't just about you. This will have an impact on the lives of countless living beings on ours die. How can we be so blasé about handing out this divine ability? If we make just a single misstep and the Seamless Gate acquires it...we might very well end up losing this entire war. We'll never be able to recover!"

"I know that...but do you really think that I'm a spy?!" Thundergod was still unwilling to bow his head.

Daoist Three Purities said calmly, "I know that you badly desire to learn this technique, and that you think you have a good chance of succeeding."

"Of course! Even Ji Ning was able to learn it. My mastery over lightning is second to none in the Three Realms. Why wouldn't I be able to?" Thundergod glanced at Ning, who was standing next to Subhuti. A lofty, self-confident look was in his eyes. "I know more about Ninehorn Lightning Serpents than anyone else. All I need is a tiny hint about this technique and I might very well master it at one go."

"Such arrogance." A deep, sonorous voice suddenly rang out.

Thundergod immediately turned his head to look. He discovered that the speaker was the fur-clad Suiren. Suiren's beard flowed like the whiskers of a dragon, and his gaze caused even Thundergod to feel his heart clench. This was the most ancient, most powerful member of the human race. Long ago, he had caused even Elder God Zhurong to bow his head and admit inferiority. In the past, for the sake of protecting the human race, Suiren had challenged all comers to display his power. He had actually beaten Thundergod senseless.

"Most of the major powers present understand that the big picture is what matters. They know what matters and what doesn't." Suiren gave Thundergod a look, then swept his gaze towards the others. "However...I imagine that all of you are quite curious regarding this evasion divine

ability. I'll let you all take a look."

"No!"

"Human Sovereign, you must not."

"You absolutely must not."

Instantly, quite a few major powers began to cry out in disagreement.

"If we really do have a spy amongst our ranks, that would be disastrous." Exalted Celestial Carefree argued frantically against it.

As for Thundergod, his eyes lit up. If he was able to acquire this technique, it would be a wonderful thing.

"There's no need to worry," Suiren said. "I'll only reveal a very small part of this evasion divine ability. This part is just one of the many difficulties that are inherent in cultivating this technique. I trust that after seeing this part...everyone will understand how difficult it is to learn this technique."

After he spoke, one flame after another began to appear within the Void around him. Every single flame twisted into the form of a character, resulting in a dense cluster of characters appearing within the Void. This was a record of part of this technique. Instantly, all the major powers looked towards it.

"Eh?" The nearby Ning hurriedly turned to look as well. "That's really the Ninehorn Lightning Serp-..."

"Wait. They changed it a bit."

Ning quickly finished reading through it. He continued to stand there quite calmly, not saying a word...but in his heart, he sighed with utter amazement.

The part of the technique which Suiren had just made public pertained to the taming of the Ninehorn Lightning Serpent. Originally, the technique had described three items which one could use to tame the serpents; chaos nectar, Myriad Thunders Godgems, and Thousandrot Godfruits. One of them had to be used! The version which Suiren had

publicized, however, had a fourth, additional option...

To ‘use heartforce to commune with the Ninehorn Lightning Serpent, then tame it’.

“Everyone, you can see it for yourself.” Suiren’s sonorous voice boomed out, reverberating within the Void. “This is the final part of the [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] evasion technique, the part which involves the taming of the serpent itself. You can succeed by using either chaos nectar, Myriad Thunders Godgems, or Thousandrot Godfruits. But do any of you have any? Do they exist anywhere within the Three Realms?”

Dead silence.

Everyone was thinking on this matter.

Some of these major powers had previously slain alien Outsiders and had acquired techniques from them, and thus had heard of those three items. Even in the infinite primordial chaos, those three treasures were incredibly rare and precious. They didn’t exist in the Three Realms at all!

“Without those three treasures, the only option remaining is the fourth option, the most clumsy option,” Suiren said. “To use heartforce to commune with a lightning serpent and tame it. Ninehorn Lightning Serpents are sentient, which is why they can be tamed, but to use heartforce to do so is incredibly difficult, and the chances for success are incredibly low. All of us have tried to use heartforce to tame the serpents, but all of us failed.”

Daoist Three Purities shook his head. “I can be considered as quite learned in the art of heartforce, but I was still unable to tame a serpent.”

No one present knew what to say. All five of them, with Subhuti being the sixth, had failed?

It must be understood that almost all of them had reached the fourth stage of heartforce. Daoist Three Purities in particular was particularly skilled in the application of heartforce; his breadth of knowledge in heartforce was not one whit inferior to that of Old Man Yuan’s.

“In the end, it was my young friend Ji Ning who succeeded. He is

extremely talented in the application of heartforce.” Suiren looked towards Ning, letting out an approving sigh. “He was able to come up with a heartforce sword technique years ago, after just a few decades of cultivation. Then, during the Realmwar, he came up with his own soul heartforce technique. Now, he’s successfully mastered the [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] evasion technique. I feel tremendous admiration for him.”

Ning could sense that Human Sovereign Suiren was looking towards him with a very gentle, loving look in his eyes. Suiren’s repeated praises to all these other major powers made Ning feel quite embarrassed, as in reality Ning had relied on chaos nectar to succeed.

What he didn’t understand was that Suiren, being the oldest human major power, viewed all the talented humans who came after him as he would his own grandchildren. He was extremely protective of humanity. Nuwa had initially only created a few humans, after all; the race had only proliferated after countless generations of procreation. It was actually entirely possible that Ning held the blood of Suiren’s lineage within his veins.

In addition, it was Suiren who ended up being the overlord who trained in the [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] technique. Thus, Suiren felt as though he owed Ning.

“Training in this technique involves multiple difficulties. I’ve merely described one of them to you.” Suiren stared at Thundergod. “Thundergod, do you still believe that you can master it? As I recall...you’ve only reached the second stage of heartforce.”

Thundergod was silent, not saying a thing.

He was unwilling to accept this! But he also knew full well that if not even Daoist Three Purities was able to use heartforce to tame the serpents, the chances of him succeeding would be even more remote.

“Thus, Thundergod...” Subhuti said calmly, “Don’t think that just because Ji Ning was able to learn this technique, that you would be able to learn it as well. To learn this sort of supreme evasion technique...you

need strength, skill, and luck. You can't be lacking in any of the criteria!"

"Why would you even compare me to a puny little Empyrean God?" Thundergod snapped, somewhat embarrassed and irritated.

"Houyi was once a 'mere' Empyrean God as well," Subhuti said calmly.

"You...!" Thundergod was infuriated.

"If you continue to have such a poor temper, you'll probably never be able to break through in heartforce." After saying this, Subhuti couldn't be bothered to say anything else.

Exalted Celestial Thundergod and the rest of his fellows were all born at the True God level of power from the primordial chaos! However, there's a flip side to all things. They didn't have the experience of starting weak and slowly growing powerful. They didn't undergo enough mental toughening, and so almost all of these True Gods and Elder Gods of Primordial Chaos had poor talent for heartforce. Even the likes of Daoist Three Purities and Lord Tathagata, who had been iron-willed enough to repeatedly commit suicide and throw themselves into the cycle of reincarnation, had only been able to reach the fourth level of heartforce. As for those who merely had their clones go reincarnate, their heartforce was even weaker.

Thundergod was clearly a classic example. He was born with incredible power and arrogance. Because of his great power, he was naturally able to hold great sway over the lives and deaths of others, resulting in his terrible temper growing even worse.

Deep in his heart, he viewed those weaker than him with disdain.

Those creatures were nothing more than crawling worms! He was a True God of Primordial Chaos. Those weak little fellows were nothing compared to him.

"You can all leave. The six of us will discuss the matter of how to transmit this technique to others without giving the Seamless Gate any chance to steal it," Daoist Three Purities said.

"Let's go."

“Let’s go.”

Instantly, the various incarnations all began to vanish. Daoist Yu Qiu tore a hole through the Void and left as well. As for Thundergod, he gave Ning a hard look, then turned and left. Clearly, in his heart Thundergod had already transferred to Ning all the resentment he felt for having lost so much face in front of so many major powers today. All of this was because of Ji Ning...a puny Empyrean God and True Immortal!

“Disciple, no need to quibble with Thundergod.” Subhuti looked at Ning, then chuckled. “He was born a True God, but that was just a matter of luck. That Dao-heart of his...he’s essentially reached his limit. He can forget about improving even one whit.”

“I wouldn’t dare be angry with him,” Ning said hurriedly.

“Mm.” Subhuti nodded. “You can leave now.”

.....

The vast prisonworld. The endless ‘skies’ of this world were covered with countless divine runes. They were part of the large, marvelous formation that extracted the essence the primordial chaos, refining it into chaos nectar.

Even as Ning had been negotiating with the Godking and meeting with the True Gods and Daofathers, his two clones within this world continued to sweep through it.

Where did the [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] evasion technique come from? The prisonworld!

Ning knew very well that this prisonworld was a tremendous source of karmic luck for him.

He had to make good use of it!

“I, True God Skysplitter, dominated the land for multiple chaos cycles. I’ve killed more than a hundred puny True Immortals like you...who would’ve thought that I’d end up dying in the hands of an ant? What a joke. A joke!” A shackled True God dressed in tattered clothes raised his

head, roaring with fury.

BOOM!!!!

His entire body blasted apart, causing the entire area inside the formation to shudder.

As for the white-robed Ji Ning who was outside the formation, keeping the 'Eight Fires Qiankun World' active, he could sense the three divine swords within his body absorb an enormous amount of baleful energy, causing them to rapidly grow. There was no way he was going to let all of this baleful energy go to waste. With the Darknorth swords gone, he had procured three other exquisite swords to use. He had also named them 'Darknorth swords', and so he now had a total of six 'Darknorth swords'. "This time, my luck wasn't bad. I met a True God who only had a little bit of divine power left. I managed to finish him off after just a few years. Alas, everyone imprisoned here had extraordinarily high status back in their world. All of them are simply too proud."

Whoosh.

After briefly inspecting and collecting the relics left behind by True God Skysplitter, Ning flew away.

Just one hour later, he arrived at a vast prairie. A True Immortal dressed in beautiful golden robes was imprisoned here, his shackles stretching off into an empty Void.

"Odd. Most people imprisoned here are conserving their energy, but this True Immortal has kept his clothes in perfect shape." The white-robed Ning flew towards him through the skies.

"He is...True Immortal Sevenwind?" Ning immediately recognized the person upon seeing his face. Ning had engaged in multiple soulscours, and thus now knew quite a bit regarding the chaos-kingdom of Pangaea. The True Immortal in front of him had maintained his original appearance instead of allowing himself to turn skeletally thin like the others, making him easy to recognize.

Ning quickly flew forward, then descended outside the formation.

“Overseer?” The beautifully dressed True Immortal looked at Ning, then suddenly frowned. “You...”

“The chaos-kingdom of Pangaea has already been destroyed.” Ning chuckled. “This prisonworld has fallen into my hands. I can’t just sit outside such a treasure vault without entering and making use of it, right? Thus, you have two choices right now. One, let me soulscour you and take away your treasures. Two...die. Prior to this, I’ve already encountered and dealt with four True Gods and True Immortals. Here are their treasures.”

Whoosh. One Protocosmic spirit-treasure after another began to appear in front of Ning, hovering in the air and emanating auras of shocking power.

“Empress Jin? Skysplitter...” The formerly tranquil True Immortal Sevenwind’s face instantly changed. Everyone imprisoned here was an influential member of society in Pangaea. The True Immortals that Ning had encountered were all first-tier True Immortals; he hadn’t encountered a single one of the second-tier ones thus far. True Immortal Sevenwind naturally knew how formidable the four slain ones were.”

“Hah.” True Immortal Sevenwind laughed as he looked at Ning. “I’m nothing more than a prisoner now. What’s the point of resisting? In the future, would you be willing to release me?”

“If I have gain the power I need to release you, I will,” Ning said.

True Immortal Sevenwind nodded, then shut his eyes.

Ning was absolutely delighted. This was the fifth True God/True Immortal he had encountered. The previous four had required quite a bit of time and effort on his power to deal with, but this one had been willing to submit right away. Ning immediately stretched out with his hand. His arm stretched out hundreds of kilometers, landing atop True Immortal Sevenwind’s head as Ning began the soulscour.

Time continued to flow onwards, one minute after the next.

“Eh?” Ning suddenly halted.

“[Icefire Jindan Smelting]?”

In True Immortal Sevenwind's memories, Ning discovered a particular thought-bubble that was unprotected by any life-oaths which contained something called the [Icefire Jindan Smelting] technique. Ning's soul quickly began to memorize the contents of the thought-bubble.

Ning's long arm rapidly began to shrink as he returned to normal. He just stood there, dazed.

"[Icefire Jindan Smelting]..."

"Ninefire Lava...Iceheart Pith..." Ning mumbled to himself.

"Is this...destiny?"

Earlier, when Exalted Celestial Thundergod had shown Ning disdain, Ning hadn't grown angry. His heartforce had reached the fourth level; he knew very well that he was indeed just an Empyrean God and True Immortal. Although he had a formidable evasion technique, he was still far, far away from the power level of a top-tier Daofather like Thundergod. Thundergod would be able to kill him ease.

There was no one to blame for it from himself for being weak.

If Ning wanted to prove himself to the Daofathers, he had to train to a level where he was equal in power to them! However, he truly didn't expect that in such a short period of time after the gathering of Daofathers, he would discover a Jindan upgrade method within his prisonworld.

"Upgrading the Jindan requires outside sources of energy and materials. Chaos ingredients are necessary." Ning sighed softly to himself, "I had thought that even if I was to obtain such a technique, actually upgrading my Jindan would be incredibly difficult. I'd have to find many Chaos ingredients, and it's quite possible that I would never find many of them."

"But..."

"This [Icefire Jindan Smelting] technique requires just two types of Chaos ingredients; Ninefire Lava and Iceheart Pith. Although it'll be hard, it's still possible for me."

Ninefire Lava...

Ning had heard of it long ago. It existed in the Three Realms! The Three Realms was born from the collision of two large chaosworlds, after all, and it had many major powers who often roamed the primordial chaos, collecting quite a few Chaos ingredients. Right at this very moment, the treasure vaults of the Sovereigns of Mankind held Ninefire Lava within it. He absolutely could trade for it using his own treasures!

Thus, the 'Ninefire Lava' would be easily acquired. It wasn't viewed as particularly precious in the Three Realms, because to date the Three Realms had discovered no use for it, aside from using it to forge treasures! For now, the Three Realms had discovered no other uses.

As for Iceheart Pith, it didn't exist in the Three Realms. But...

"Iceheart Pith can be found in Undermoon Lake!"

Undermoon Lake had Iceheart Leaves...and Iceheart Leaves grew out of Iceheart Pith.

"The Seamless Gate's Godking is forcing me into Undermoon Lake. Now that I have this Jindan upgrade method, I'm in desperate need of Iceheart Pith. And I just so happen to be heading towards Undermoon Lake..." Ning suddenly felt that fate truly worked in mysterious ways.

"No matter what...I absolutely have to acquire Iceheart Pith! So long as I acquire those two Chaos ingredients, I'll be able to use this [Icefire Jindan Smelting]] method. By then, I'll be a second-tier True Immortal; I'll have half-stepped into the Daofather level." Ning finally began to have the feeling that he was beginning to gain the power he needed to fight back in this war.

Chapter 5: The Treasury

Sword Immortal world. The towering Five Treasured Peaks.

Ji Ning stood atop a cloud in front of the stone cliffs of the fourth peak, staring intently at the fourth chapter of the [Five Treasures] sword-art. Ning hadn't been in a hurry to immediately go to Undermoon Lake after the meeting with the Nuwa Alliance's major powers. He first headed to the Five Treasured Peaks to carefully read through chapter four.

It had been years, but despite all his hard work Ning remained unable to master the third chapter! It was obvious that for him to read through the fourth chapter before mastering the third was a bit too impatient. The reason he was doing this was because he was about to enter Undermoon Lake.

Undermoon Lake was an incredibly mysterious place. Once he entered, he would be completely shut off from the outside world. Not even his Primaltwin or his other clones would be able to communicate with the clone that had entered Undermoon Lake! Ever since the Primordial Era, thousands of Empyrean Gods had entered Undermoon Lake, many of whom had Primlatwins or other clones living in the Three Realms. This was the reason why despite that, no one knew exactly what was inside Undermoon Lake.

To this very day, Buddha Jueming was the only person to leave the place after having entered it. He had come back with three treasures, but had only said that the place contained many treasures within it. He had carefully described these three treasures to others, but with regards to the dangers and events which occurred within Undermoon Lake, he was completely close-mouthed.

The only person who had ever left the place was unwilling to say anything about it at all. Undermoon Lake was a complete mystery!

Buddha Jueming had entered when he was merely an Empyrean God. After he became a Buddha, many Empyrean Gods in the Three Realms felt certain that Undermoon Lake must be a place of fortune and

tempering. Thus, there were still many who were willing to enter the lake and risk their lives. Alas...no one else had ever left.

“My true body’s clones shall immediately lose contact with the outside world upon entering Undermoon Lake. I’m afraid I’ll spend quite a bit of time within it. If that’s the case, the clone that enters Undermoon Lake will work hard on the [Five Treasures] sword-art with the primary goal of perfecting the ‘Shadowless’ stance of my [Brightmoon] sword-art. As for my other clones and my Primaltwin clones in the Three Realms, they’ll meditate on the [Five Treasures] to improve the other four stances of [Brightmoon].”

There was no way to link the memories together when separated by Undermoon Lake. There was no point in duplicating his efforts in Undermoon Lake and the Three Realms; that would be a waste of time.

The Shadowless stance was the most mysterious stance, and an incredibly fast one. For a single clone to train in it was quite suitable.

After returning from Undermoon Lake, his memories would merge together again. Because they had been training in completely different things, once all those memories merged, his insights might very well increase dramatically.

“[Icefire Jindan Smelting]?” The Ning who was carefully reading the fourth chapter, attempting to get a clearer picture of it, was suddenly stunned.

This was the moment that his clone within the prisonworld had discovered the [Icefire Jindan Smelting] technique.

“I had been planning to closely read through the [Five Treasures], then head straight to Undermoon Lake. Now, it seems, I need to pay a visit to the Humanworld of Yu the Great first,” Ning mused to himself.

A day later.

After having memorized the [Five Treasures] multiple times, Ning boarded his Voidboat and flew towards the headquarters of the Primordial Imperial Clan, the Humanworld of Yu the Great.

“Fellow Daoist Ji Ning.” A voice rang out as a muscular, fur-clad man appeared out of nowhere.

“Empyrean God Fuqu.” Ning smiled. Last time, it had been Fuqu who had welcomed him as well. This was primarily because one of Fuqu’s primary responsibilities in the Primordial Imperial Clan was to welcome guests.

Fuqu looked at Ning with a gaze that was a bit different than before. This was because, just a day ago, Ning had shown off his [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] technique and roamed through the Three Realms, slaughtering the Seamless Gate’s forces until the Seamless Gate had bowed their heads. News of this had quickly spread out, and even the major powers of the Nuwa Alliance were often discussing this matter. They all tsked and sighed appreciatively, “Ji Ning truly is talented in heartforce.”

All of the major powers of the Nuwa Alliance truly believed that Ning had relied on heartforce alone to tame a serpent.

In truth, after Suiren had carefully analyzed and researched the [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] technique, he had the feeling that there was a tiny chance one could indeed use heartforce to tame a serpent, which was why he inserted the part about heartforce into the technique’s description. This also served the dual purpose of hiding the fact that they had the necessary chaos nectar. Only by deceiving their own would they also be able to deceive the Seamless Gate.

“Might I ask why you have come again, fellow Daoist Ji Ning?” Empyrean God Fuqu asked.

“I wish to pay a visit to the treasury and trade for some treasures,” Ning said.

“Oh. Quite a few fellow Daoists of the Three Realms have come to visit the treasury, but this is your first trip, fellow Daoist Ji Ning. I had thought that our treasures didn’t match up to your expectations.” Fuqu chortled. “Come, come. Follow me in.”

Moments later, two streaks of light shot past the winding clouds that

were outside a grouping of ancient palaces. They flew straight into one of the palaces.

“The Primordial Imperial Clan truly is extraordinary.” As Ning flew forward, he paid close attention to his surroundings, and he couldn’t help but feel stunned.

The nominal managing power of the Three Realms, the Celestial Court, was extremely beautiful and filled with lofty jade buildings.

The imperial palace of the Grand Xia had the Skylight Palace, an absolutely dominating fixture that was not one whit inferior to the Celestial Court.

But...

The Palaces of Mankind of the Primordial Imperial Clan was quite simple and plain. And yet, every single palace gave Ning a sensation of tremendous pressure.

“Our human race spent countless years during the Primordial Era to build them,” Fuqu said proudly. “We produced a total of thirty-six top-grade Pure Yang-level magic treasures which could be used as palaces. Over the course of time, they’ve grown more powerful and all of them have become Protocosmic spirit-treasures. These thirty-six supreme Protocosmic spirit-treasures match perfectly with a formation-diagram which Human Sovereign Fuxi has created, and their joint power is equal to that of a Chaos treasure.”

“All those years ago, during the war that destroyed the Primordial Era, the Palaces of Mankind played a major role and rendered many merits,” Fuqu said proudly.

Nind nodded, sighing in amazement. The Palaces of Mankind were indeed like an impregnable fort!

“This is the Palace of the Numerous Heavens.” Fuqu led Ning into a large gray palace. “The treasury is right inside. There are a few Immortals inside right now as well. Pick what you want. As long as you have enough treasure, you’ll be allowed to trade for it. I still have other tasks to attend

to, so I won't stay here with you any longer."

"Thank you, Empyrean God Fuqu," Ning said with a smile. Fuqu transformed into a streak of light and departed, leaving Ning here. Ning turned and stepped inside the treasury.

Many of the major powers and experts of the Nuwa Palace had placed the treasures they didn't need into this place. It made for an utterly astonishing sight!

There were piles of powerful Protocosmic spirit-treasures, and the weakest treasures here were at least at the Pure Yang level. There were many Chaos ingredients and materials as well. Virtually everything could be found here!

During normal times, the various major powers would probably hide their treasures in other locations, making these items almost impossible to locate and trade for. Now that the storm had descended, everyone took out everything they didn't need.

"What fine treasures." Ning knew, however, that only treasures which were a good fit for him were truly 'good' treasures.

He first procured five kilograms of the two other types of materials the Seamless Gate had requested. In truth, the Seamless Gate had underestimated Ji Ning. As they saw it, he was still just an Empyrean God and True Immortal; if they demanded too many valuable treasures, there would be no way Ji Ning could produce them. Thus, two of the three treasures the Godking had requested were fairly common.

If they knew that Ning had acquired a prisonworld of the chaos-kingdom of Pangaea, giving him thousands of times as many treasures as they had expected, they would probably feel quite regretful.

"How much of this Ninefire Lava do you have?" Ning asked.

"Senior Darknorth." Instantly, a Celestial Immortal walked over and said respectfully, "We have quite a bit of this Ninefire Lava, more than a million kilograms. All of it was discovered in the past by Human Sovereign Suiren in the primordial chaos. If you need more, senior

Darknorth, the Human Sovereign should be able to provide you with it.”

Ning nodded. “Give me half a million kilograms of it.”

Chaos materials could differ greatly in value. Chaos goldstone, for example, was available in almost limitless supply. Some of the medicinal herbs that could be found in the primordial chaos were extremely rare and valuable, while others could be produced in enormous batches.

Ninefire Lava and Iceheart Pith were fairly average items as Chaos materials went. Whenever they appeared, they would appear in large quantities. The Iceheart Leaves of Undermoon Lake grew out of large quantities of Iceheart Pith; although the pith was valuable, it was naturally on a lower level of value compared to the leaves.

[Icefire Jindan Smelting]...

There were different levels to the technique. This was much like how the higher levels of Ning’s [Starseizing Hand] required increasingly large amounts and increasingly expensive types of Five Elements treasures!’

When smelting a treasure, the more valuable the ingredients you used, the more powerful the flames would have to be to smelt it! In turn, the higher-level the Jindan in the body was, the more materials the [Icefire Jindan Smelting] technique would require.

A Celestial Immortal’s Jindan needed one level of items, while a True Immortal’s Jindan would require a high level’s worth of items. As for an Ancestral Immortal/Daofather’s Jindan...those were simply far too powerful. To transform them would require even more treasures, none of which would be so easily acquired.

“According to my records, to advance a True Immortal’s Jindan from the third-tier to the second-tier will require 5000 kilograms of Ninefire Lava and 5000 kilograms of Iceheart Pith. I have more than thirty clones; I’ll need more than 150,000 kilograms of each. Alright...the Ninefire Lava was the easy part. Iceheart Pith...I wonder how much of it exists in Undermoon Lake.” Ning boarded the Voidboat, then left the Palaces of Mankind.

Ning only had to hand over six Protocosmic spirit-treasures and three sets of top-grade Pure Yang treasures. The Empyrean Gods and True Immortals of the Seamless Gate which Ning had slain had provided Ning with dozens of Protocosmic spirit-treasures. It was normal for ordinary Empyrean Gods and True Immortals to have several Protocosmic spirit-treasures with them, after all.

“Time to go to Undermoon Lake.”

The Voidboat quickly traversed through the great Void, speeding towards and entering the infinite primordial chaos.

Chapter 6: The World of Undermoon Lake

Prisonworld 17.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! A series of white-robed figures flew through the region of primordial chaos, entering the vast prisonworld. A total of sixteen white-robed figures levitated in midair. All eighteen of Ning's clones had entered the prisonworld now.

"Before I go to Undermoon Lake, I need to complete certain careful preparations." Fifteen of the sixteen white-robed youths instantly vanished, leaving behind only the one with the Ninehorn Lightning Serpent.

Whoosh. An enormous black lightning serpent streaked through the skies, rapidly flying off into the distance.

Although Ning had acquired quite a few treasures thanks to his many battles against the Seamless Gate, that amount couldn't come close to comparing to the things he had gained from this prisonworld. Even the prisonworld's Empyrean Gods and Celestial Immortals had carried extremely rare and valuable treasures with him, thanks to the fact that all of them had extraordinary backgrounds. As for the True Gods and True Immortals, they were equivalent to the Daofathers of the Three Realms, and so their treasures were even more shocking.

"Undermoon Lake is too mysterious a place. To this very day, only Buddha Jueming managed to survive it and emerge from it. It's very possible that this clone of mine will die inside. I need to bring some good treasures with me, but I can't take the very best ones," Ning mused to himself.

Thus far, Ning had already disposed of Empress Jin, True God Skysplitter, and three other True Gods and True Immortals. These were all figures that were comparable to Daofathers! Every single one of them possessed treasures that were far better than Ning's Voidboat and Darknorth swords. Although most weren't a good fit for Ning, there were some that were.

True God Skysplitter, for example. After he self-detonated and died, he had left behind a total of nine divine swords. Each of them were Protocosmic spirit-treasures, and they formed a complete set! This set of swords alone was enough to make the True Gods and Daofathers of the Three Realms turn glaze-eyed with lust.

There was no way Ning would be willing to take them into Undermoon Lake. Even in the prisonworld, only a few True Gods and True Immortals specialized in the sword. It was entirely possible that after sweeping through the entire prisonworld, he still wouldn't be able to find a better set of swords.

"My true body has eighteen clones. I'll send two of them into Undermoon Lake; sending an extra clone will give me an extra chance for success." Ning made up his mind.

The two clone he had sent naturally didn't include the clone that possessed the Ninehorn Lightning Serpent.

Of the eighteen clones, just a single one was in possession of a Ninehorn Lightning Serpent. These serpents were far too hard to come by; if he ended up losing it within Undermoon Lake, he would feel endless regret.

"I'll take these treasures with me." Ning finished selecting his treasures.

First, he chose a set of 729 top-grade Pure Yang flying swords which he would use for the [Greater Thousand Swords] formation. He had acquired 720 of these swords from the first Celestial Immortal he had met in the prisonworld, Liangqiu. There weren't many Empyrean Gods or True Immortals in the Three Realms who could afford to be spend so much on swords. This set would allow him to launch distant attacks.

Next, he chose a set of twelve swords that were well-suited for close combat. All of them were also top-grade Pure Yang swords.

After that, he selected a Protocosmic spirit-treasure meant for fleeing, the 'Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle' 1. Ning actually had several Protocosmic treasures of this type, having acquired three from the True Gods and True Immortals of the prisonworld and a few from the Seamless Gate.

Naturally, he also brought along some Ninefire Lava and other necessary treasures such as spirit pills. No one knew how long he would be trapped there, after all.

Ning brought along fifty thousand kilograms of Ninefire Lava. Supposedly, Undermoon Lake had Iceheart Pith inside; he would absolutely be able to refine and upgrade his golden pellet Jindan with Undermoon Lake.

After completing his preparations, the white-robed Ning boarded his Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle and began to travel towards Undermoon Lake.

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The Three Realms. Sword Immortal world. The thatched cottage in front of the Five Treasured Peaks.

The black-robed Ning was seated in the lotus position within the cottage. Since his true bodies were going to hide for now, it was time for the Primaltwin Ning to take the lead. It was now the Primaltwin which carried the Starseizing Manor with it. Given how strong the Primaltwin was, it was also capable of joining together into the Rahu Formation as it pleased.

.....

An enormous star hung there in the primordial chaos, emanating a gentle aura of light that shone down upon the chaos around it.

This star was very similar to the Lunar Star. Because the Lunar Star was located in the Void outside the Three Realms, there was no chaos blocking its light, allowing it to shine down upon the entire Three Realms. Although the star in front of Ning was very similar to the Lunar Star, it wasn't particularly famous. The countless ordinary denizens of the Three Realms, at least, had no idea of its existence.

"Undermoon Lake!"

Seated within his Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle, the white-robed youth stared off into the distance.

An utterly titanic lake of water hung there in the middle of the primordial chaos. It was so vast, even Ning's heartforce couldn't cover it all. The surface of this endless lake of water was extremely calm and tranquil, making it as flat and smooth as a mirror. It reflected the image of the enormous nearby star, which appeared within it like the reflection of the moon. It truly was absolutely mesmerizing.

"Undermoon Lake truly is an odd place. One has to be an Empyrean God to enter it; anyone else, including True Gods and Daofathers, are completely unable to pass through it. If they try to force their way into the lake, the waters of the lake will squeeze and compress around them, preventing them from entering the world within."

Ning didn't hesitate. "Time to go in."

Whoosh.

Ning's Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle swooped into the water. Plop! Water sprayed upwards from the point of impact as Ning and the shuttle both completely disappeared.

.....

In the instant that he entered Undermoon Lake, Ning felt a strange ripple of energy surround him. And then, spacetime distorted and changed. This was a subtle transformation that was filled with the faint aura of primordial chaos. Given Ning's heartforce abilities, even when Patriarch Subhuti used a spacetime-distorting technique he would still be able to see and potentially evade it, but this spacetime distortion came naturally, not revealing any flaws or traces at all.

Whoosh.

Ning fell down from the skies. As soon as he landed, he saw that he was standing upon a piece of scorched rock that was three hundred meters long.

"This place is...?" Ning put away the shuttle, scanning his surroundings.

He was surrounded by a seemingly endless sea. Its waves continuously washed across the scorched stone.

A bright moon hung high in the sky, its cold and clear moonlight shining down upon the entire sea.

“This...” Ning stared at this in astonishment. Ahead of him was a floating wooden bridge. At one end of the bridge was this scorched stone he was standing upon, while the other end stretched far off into the horizon, where sea met sky. Not even Ning could see to the end of the bridge with his eyes alone.

“How long is this floating bridge?” Ning was speechless. He immediately sent out his heartforce to take a look. Ning had already grown accustomed to using heartforce in dangerous areas, because it was even more unfathomable and mysterious than coresense. True Gods and Daofathers who were weaker than him in heartforce wouldn’t even notice him scanning them. But of course, they in turn would be able to scan him with coresense without him noticing.

“Eh? My heartforce...?” Ning’s heart clenched. He had clearly spread out his heartforce, but he wasn’t able to find anything at all.

“Coresense.” Ning immediately sent out his coresense to investigate as well, but as he had expected, even coresense was unable to detect a thing.

Ning’s face changed. Very, very few in the Three Realms were capable of blocking out coresense and heartforce.

“That bright moon in the skies...where is that moon from?” Ning raised his head to stare at the moon. “Can it be the star outside this world?”

Swoosh! Ning soared into the skies, flying higher and higher. He flew for hundreds of thousands of kilometers before, with a thud, he rammed into an invisible barrier. A series of concentric ripples spread out from the part of the barrier which Ning struck. As for the bright moon, it was still far, far above him in the depths of the sky. There was no way to move any closer to it at all.

Ning pondered carefully for a moment, then elected to once more return to that floating wooden bridge. He advanced rapidly, because he had the feeling that the reason why this bridge existed was to serve as a guide for people to know where to go.

“Thousands of Empyrean Gods have entered Undermoon Lake since ancient times. Why haven’t I encountered any of them?”

Ning stood there atop his Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle. The shuttle followed the floating wooden bridge forward, advancing at a rapid pace. It flew for millions of kilometers, but still the only thing to be seen was the endless sea and that lonely little bridge. The only sound that could be heard was that of the water slapping against the sides of the bridge.

This made Ning even more wary.

“Although Buddha Jueming successfully escaped this place, he refused to say anything about it. Even when other major powers asked him, he still refused to say a thing. As for the thousands of other Empyrean Gods...” Ning frowned. “Are all of them dead?”

The thought of how thousands of Empyrean Gods might have perished here made Ning even more nervous.

Whooooosh. He continued to fly forward, the shuttle advancing at an astonishing pace. He had flown for more than a hundred million kilometers, but there was still nothing besides the endless bridge.

Suddenly, far off in the distance, an ugly green head suddenly popped out from beneath the surface of the sea. The head stared at the distant white-robed youth aboard the shuttle. Because Ning was only able to see with his eyes, he wasn’t able to discover the appearance of this creature.

“Here comes another one,” the jade-green head mused softly, eyes filled with an excited gleam of bloodlust.

*

1. Ruyi is a very difficult to translate term which basically means, ‘as one wills’; it suggests that it can transform free in size and shape, or that it will allow him to go where he desires.

Chapter 7: Yaksha

The Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle followed the floating bridge forward, flying at high speed. Ji Ning, however, maintained a vigilant watch. He continued to have the feeling that the seemingly-peaceful world of Undermoon Lake was hiding a terrifyingly lethal danger within it.

Deep within the depths of the sea.

A completely jade-green human-shaped figure, steel warfork in hand, was drawing close to Ning at high speed. Every so often, he would vanish and reappear more than a hundred thousand kilometers away. Soon, he stealthily arrived in an area located in front of Ning. His dark-red gaze pierced through the water, seeing the distant shuttle fly forward at high speed along the bridge's path. His long tongue licked his lower jaw as he murmured to himself, "It's rare for new prey to come. I hope this one is strong. Otherwise, it'll be quite boring."

"Ah, here he comes. Attack!"

The jade-green humanoid suddenly burst out from the surface of the sea, transforming into a green blur that streaked towards Ning.

"Eh?" Although he had been flying for a long period of time, he hadn't relaxed at all. Ning was rather shocked. "He was able to get so close to me without me noticing at all."

Ning's pupils were filled with torchlight, and he used the [Torch Dragon's Eye] to see his foe clearly.

This was an oceanic creature that looked rather like a yaksha-demon. The yaksha had a pair of dark-red eyes that were filled with a baleful, murderous aura, and it was wielding a steel warfork that it stabbed straight towards Ning.

"I need to capture him and take a good look." Ning stretched out with his arm, and it instantly expanded, transforming and becoming enormous enough to cover the skies themselves as his fingers reached out to the jade yaksha. This was Ning's [Starseizing Hand] divine ability. The

yaksha sensed a tremendous amount of danger from this attack, and it immediately roared in a shrill voice, "BREAK!"

"Eh? This jade yaksha speaks in the language of Pangaea?" Ning murmured to himself. However, he showed no mercy at all.

BOOM!

Although the steel warfork stabbed into his palm, the enormous star-seizing hand still wrapped itself around the jade yaksha, capturing it. No matter how it struggled, it was unable to escape.

"Tell me, what exactly is going on in this world? And what happened to the thousands of Empyrean Gods who came before?" Ning barked coldly, his hand still wrapped firmly around the creature.

"Heh heh, so you have a bit of talent after all. How unexpected." The captured yaksha actually let out a shrill laugh, dark-red eyes staring weighingly at Ning. "Interesting, quite interesting. It's been a long time since I've encountered a formidable opponent. You were able to capture my clone in just a single exchange...this will be fun. Fun!"

"Clone?" Ning was stunned.

"Kid...this was just the start." The green-haired yaksha laughed savagely, then suddenly transformed into a stream of liquid that quickly flew out from Ning's palm.

"Transformed into water?" Ning barked coldly, "Even if you transform into a damn ghost, you still won't escape!"

Boom! Yet another enormous palm came sweeping over.

Ning's left and right hands seemed to have transformed into two enormous black stormclouds. They viciously clapped against each other. BOOM!!!! The stream of water that was caught between those two enormous hands was instantly and completely destroyed, leaving behind only a shrill voice reverberating in the empty skies: "Ahahaha...how intriguing...how intriguing!"

After slaying the yaksha, Ning once returned to stand within his Ruyi

Soulsnake Shuttle. The sea wind blew past him, causing his white robes to flutter.

“Judging from what that jade yaksha said, just now I merely battled one of his clones? And he tried to kill me without negotiating or speaking to me at all. I haven’t encountered any Empyrean Gods yet....is it because all of them have been killed?” Ning couldn’t help but shiver. Thousands of Empyrean Gods...perhaps the vast majority were ordinary in power, but some were truly top-tier experts. A few might be even more powerful than Ning!

If Ning didn’t use the Rahu Formation, on Mount Innerheart alone the likes of Redsnow, Silvermoon, and Goldcrow were figures that Ning was no match for. In an actual battle, there were too many deficiencies in Ning’s understanding of the Dao. Only if Ning’s swordforce reached the fourth stage would he become equal to the likes of Redsnow in a frontal battle.

“I have to be even more careful.”

The Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle continued to fly forward.

“Intriguing. He was actually able to wipe out one of my clones.”

“Ahaha...it’s rare for me to encounter a tough enemy.”

“But the tough ones are fun.”

“Ahahaha.”

“Time to kill.”

One jade yaksha after another began to emerge from the depths of the sea in front of Ning, hastening towards him at high speed. At the same time, their shrill voices echoed within the world. After the time needed to boil a kettle of tea, Ning heard their shrill voices echoing in the skies. Shrill voices and strange laughter seemed to come forth from every corner of the seas. Clearly, there were an enormous number of these creatures.

“Are they all gathering together?” Ning’s eyes blazed with torchlight as he stared at his surroundings. He was able to see past the water and

locate the many jade yakshas that had appeared.

“So many?!” Ning was rather stunned. His [Torch Dragon’s Eye] alone was able to see more than a hundred of those yakshas. Although he had slain the first yaksha in a seemingly simple manner, in truth the yaksha had essentially likely reached the Empyrean God level of power. If there were enough of them, they would be able to overwhelm him with raw numbers.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

Explosions could be heard throughout the sea. One jade yaksha after another burst through the surface of the sea, standing on the water and completely surrounding Ning. All of them stared at Ning, filled with maliciousness and avarice.

With a thought, Ning put away the shuttle. He had noticed earlier that the speed of the shuttle was actually inferior to that of the jade yakshas. Thus, there was no choice but to fight; escape was not an option.

“519 clones.” A pair of blood-colored swords appeared in Ning’s hands. By now, he had no choice but to rely on his sword-arts.

“I don’t wish to be your enemy.” Ning’s gaze swept past every single one of the many jade yakshas surrounding him.

“Ahaha...but I want to kill you, kid.” The 519 jade yakshas simultaneously spoke out, saying the same words. When their voices merged together, they actually had the power to shake one’s Dao-heart. “Be careful, now. If you end up dying in my hands, don’t claim that I tricked you or plotted against you. I’m battling against you openly and fairly.

Ning, swords in hands, grew even more wary.

“Let’s go.”

Instantly...swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

Ten of the jade yakshas simultaneously circled around and attacked Ning with their steel warforks.

A killing intent suddenly flashed in the eyes of the white-robed Ning. The blood-colored swords in his hands suddenly transformed into blurs.

Slash. Slash. Slash. Slash...

The bodies of the jade yakshas were each bisected. In a single clash, ten of them had been cut in half.

[Brightmoon] sword-art, Shadowless stance!

The Shadowless stance: This was a very fast stance that was the strangest stance of all. It was meant to attack from an unpredictable angle and chop the enemy in half. Clearly, these jade yakshas were unable to block Ning's sword-art.

"Eh?" Ning's face changed slightly. The bodies of the bisected yakshas first transformed into water, then reformed to become ten more jade yakshas. And then...frenzied, bloodlusted looks appeared in the eyes of the 519 jade yakshas.

And then, the 500-plus jade yakshas all simultaneously charged towards Ning.

"[Three Heads, Six Arms]!" Ning's body blurred, then reformed with three heads and six arms. He now wielded six swords as well. Faced with the utterly relentless horde of enemies, Ning didn't dare to use the [Greater Thousand Swords Formation] against them.

Ning's six blood-red swords transformed into bloody blurs. They were simply too fast! The bloody blurs swirled around around Ning, completely blocking and halting all of the assaulting jade yakshas. In fact, many of their bodies were chopped apart and knocked flying, but moments later they would reform unharmed.

Although the 'slain' yakshas were able to reform after being bisected, Ning had the feeling that after doing so they would become noticeably weaker.

Still, Ning felt a sense of pressure and danger. The enemies were simply too numerous, and all of them could be said to have reached the Empyrean God level of power. Even against Ning's sword-arts, the

yakshas managed to land the occasional blow against his body. However, Ning's body had reached the Ninth Cycle of the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art]; it wouldn't be easy to damage. If this continued, in the end it was more likely that the enemy would be the first to lose this war of attrition. At present, Ning had only used [Three Heads, Six Arms] after all; this divine ability used up very little divine power. In addition, at the Empyrean God level the body was further perfected, easily capable of battling for months on end. If Ning used the [Starseizing Hand], the amount of time he'd be able to battle would be decreased a hundredfold.

“DAMN!!!!” A furious bellow suddenly shook the heavens.

The 519 jade yakshas simultaneously retreated backwards, levitating up into midair. All of them appeared utterly furious. Then, all of them began to ram against each other, completely merging into each other with each collision. The number of jade yakshas in the skies began to decrease as more and more of them began to fuse together.

The more yakshas fused together, the darker a green they became. Soon, their color became as black as night...but then, they became a dark-gold color. When the two final dark-gold yakshas rammed against each other, they transformed into a golden yaksha that held such power as to cause even Ning amazement.

This golden yaksha was thirty meters tall, and his aura was extremely close to that of a True God's.

“To force me to use my true body in battle...you aren't bad. Over the course of all these years, more than a thousand Empyrean Gods died without even seeing my true body,” the golden yaksha growled.

“What?! More than a thousand?!” Ning's heart shook. Most of the thousands of Empyrean Gods who had entered this place belonged to the Nuwa Alliance. Many had entered back during the Primordial Era, after all, and almost all of those belonged to the Nuwa Alliance. Ning had been hoping that he would be able to come up with a way to rescue the thousands of Empyrean Gods trapped here, but...

Apparently, an enormous number had died by the hands of this yaksha.

Indeed...surrounded by more than five hundred yakshas, very few would be able to survive.

“However...the number of Empyrean Gods that died to my true body is in excess of two thousand.” The golden yaksha stared at Ning. Light suddenly flashed within his hands, and a steel warfork that looked ancient suddenly appeared within it. The steel warfork looked very plain and simple, but it clearly had an aura of incredible power.

“You should rejoice in the fact that you will die to my true body,” the golden yaksha laughed savagely. “All of you want to acquire the relics which my master left behind...did you really think it would be that easy?”

Ning’s eyes narrowed. Master?

In truth, as soon as he had entered Undermoon Lake, Ning had the feeling that this was a place that was artificially created by a major power of the ancient days. The floating wooden bridge spanned countless kilometers, and neither coresense nor heartforce could be used to scan this place. It all suggested that this was part of a deliberate design by a major power; it didn’t seem like something that would naturally emerge from the primordial chaos.

“If you want the treasures...use your life to trade for them!” The golden yaksha laughed strangely, and then, steel warfork in his hands...suddenly vanished. He left behind just a golden streak of light in the air as he suddenly appeared before Ning. He was simply too fast; Ning only had barely enough time to use his sword to block.

Boom!

Ning transformed into a shooting star as he was knocked flying backwards. From this initial clash, Ning understood that the foe’s power was very close to that of a True God’s. “No wonder more than three thousand Empyrean Gods died to by hands.”

Chapter 8: A Surviving Empyrean God

“You are too weak. Too weak!” The golden yaksha’s frenzied voice echoed throughout the heavens as he once more transformed into a streak of golden light, chasing after Ji Ning and assaulting him repeatedly.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Ning was knocked flying backwards repeatedly, sometimes being driven into the sea, sometimes somersaulting backwards in rather pathetic fashion. He was at a definite, absolute disadvantage.

“You are really weak...but your body’s pretty tough. My [Seagod Yaksha] is incredibly strong, but you are able to easily absorb this type of punishment.” The golden yaksha continued to attack as he spoke, laughing wildly.

His words were correct; any ordinary Empyrean God body that wasn’t protected by the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art] would’ve long ago been destroyed by now.

But if he didn’t have the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art], Ning wouldn’t have dared to choose this style of fighting either!

“He’s very strong and incredibly fast, but his agility is average. His combat techniques are all quite ordinary.” Over the course of this battle, Ning quickly deduced his foe’s strengths and weaknesses. “When fighting against him, I can’t just take him head on. I have to use the intricacies of my sword-arts to deal with him.”

Whoosh.

Ning suddenly burst forth from the surface of the sea, as did the golden yaksha which was in hot pursuit of him.

“Come.” Two swords in his hands, a fierce light flashed through Ning’s eyes. It was time to counterattack.

Instantly, a total of 729 swords appeared out of nowhere. These swords all undulated in different manners as they levitated in the air. In front of

Ning's chest, a jade sword began to take form. The power of this jade sword was terrifyingly great. The only reason why Ning was able to use the ninth stage of the [Greater Thousand Swords Formation] was entirely because he had fourth-level heartforce and a soul heartforce technique.

This jade sword that was manifested by merging the power of 729 top-grade Pure Yang swords. Its power was definitely not weaker than Ning's when using the [Starseizing Hand]!

"Go." Ning pointed towards the distant Yaksha.

"Ahahaha, he's actually using an Immortal technique." The golden yaksha laughed wildly, continuing to crush forward. He didn't care if Ning was going to use close combat or long-range attacks; with his absolute advantage in power, he was crush Ning with overwhelming force.

Swish.

The jade sword struck out towards the golden yaksha, seeking to avoid the yakshas defenses, but the yaksha was simply too strong. A brandishing block with the steel warfork was able to block in time. With a 'bang' sound, the jade sword was instantly destroyed, while the golden yaksha merely paused for a moment in midair.

"Even the ninth stage of the [Greater Thousand Swords Formation] is only able to cause him to pause slightly? It seems I'll have to use heartforce." A second jade sword materialized in front of Ji Ning's body, and his invisible heartforce surged into it. The power of the second jade sword instantly rose, transforming it on a qualitative level.

Fourth stage heartforce, in and of itself, was far more powerful than the ninth-stage [Greater Thousand Swords Formation].

When using fourth stage heartforce, Ning would be able to reach the apex of power possible for Empyrean Gods and True Immortals for a short period of time. The only difference was that the likes of Redsnow would be able to fight at that level for a sustained period of time, whereas Ning would only be able to do so briefly.

"It's useless. That tiny bit of power you have is usel-..." The golden

yaksha was roaring with savage laughter as he pounced towards Ning.

The jade sword transformed into a blur. It seemed identical to the first sword, but once the golden yaksha actually reached jade sword, the speed of the jade sword suddenly increased dramatically. The heartforce within it exploded forth with full power!

The upgraded jade sword became nothing more than a vague blur in front of the golden yaksha. The golden yaksha tried to block it, but his combat techniques were simply too weak.

SLASH!

[Brightmoon] sword-art, Shadowless stance!

The jade sword sliced through the golden yaksha's body in a bizarre, unpredictable manner. Although this body was very close to that of a True God, it actually wasn't enhanced by any body-protecting divine ability at all. Assaulted by the incredibly sharp jade sword...it was instantly chopped in half.

Ning, however, remained wary and vigilant. He knew very well that the golden yaksha was able to easily dissolve and coalesce his body, or even to completely transform it into liquid. He probably wouldn't die that easily. In addition, Ning could sense that his foe's aura remained incredibly powerful.

The two halves of the bisected golden yaksha's body suddenly transformed into a flood of water. The enormous flood of water spun in midair, then completely detonated, blasting apart into countless smaller streams of water that flew everywhere. Once they touched the surface of the sea, the streams once more transformed into many jade yakshas, a total of 519 of them.

"You were actually able to injure my true body. You are qualified to pass through this section that I guard." The 519 jade yakshas stood atop the sea, staring towards Ning and speaking together in a strange voice. "However, I am merely the weakest of the guardians which Master left behind. Those ancient fellows are all more powerful than me. If you want to survive them and acquire the treasures which Master left behind...I

judge that you are lacking in power. Hahaha..."

Laughing in a shrill, ear-piercing manner, the 519 jade yakshas all flew in different directions, quickly disappearing from Ning's field of vision.

Ning just silently stood there in midair for a moment.

"Come back." The 729 top-grade Pure Yang swords all returned to his body.

"Just the weakest guardian, with more to come?" Ning frowned, murmuring softly to himself. He was slowly beginning to understand things here.

"Even the sole person to leave this place, Buddha Jueming, entered during the Primordial Era and was only able to emerge during the era of the Three Realms. It took him countless years," Ning mused to himself. "Clearly, Undermoon Lake isn't so easily traversed. The very first opponent I encountered was able to force me to use heartforce to beat him. The rest will be even harder."

Swoosh!

Ning once more boarded the Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle and continued to advance along the path of the floating wooden bridge.

After flying for more than half a day, Ning was vaguely able to make out an extremely beautiful island far off in the distance. The wooden bridge was leading towards this island as well.

"What a lovely island." Ning quickly arrived at the island and took a close look at it. The natural energy surrounding the island had all been manipulated and controlled, causing this island to be perpetually blanketed in falling snow. The island itself was very beautiful as well, and at the center of it was a beautiful palace that was at least three thousand meters high.

Atop the palace, he could see the statues of three strange beasts that were seated in the lotus position.

"A palace? Why has a palace been built here?" Ning was secretly

puzzled. He immediately landed and walked through the island, scanning his surroundings as he moved towards the palace.

Ning stood outside the palace, staring towards the insides. His eyes were filled with torch-light as he did so. He had the feeling that there was a reason this palace was here.

“Eh?” Ning’s [Torch-Dragon’s Eye] suddenly discovered a body flickering about within the deepest parts of the palace.

“It’s coming.”

“It hasn’t been a thousand years yet. Why has it come again?”

“Then let’s fight. Let’s fight!”

The figures within the darkest reaches of the palace had eyes filled with frenzy.

As for Ning, still standing outside the palace, he frowned. “I wasn’t seeing things. There really are living beings inside this place.”

Whoosh. After hesitating for a moment, Ning stepped into the palace. Here at Undermoon Lake, neither coresense nor heartforce could be used to search. Thus, the only choice was for him to investigate in person! Since the wooden bridge led to this place, this eye-catching palace definitely served a specific purpose.

This was the front palace. Two corridors connected to it led deeper into the palace. Ning chose one of them. He walked through it, leading to an enormous courtyard that was filled with many pavilions.

Whoosh! The wind suddenly moved.

Ning was still walking through the corridor. His faced changed, and a sword in his hands instantly chopped backwards. Here in the palace, Ning had naturally kept his swords in his hands.

Clang! A ringing sound could be heard, followed by a figure flashing past him.

“Stay your hands!” Ning’s face changed, and he hurriedly called out, “Stop this! I’m not an enemy!”

Slash! Yet another gust of wind as yet another blurred form appeared.

“Empyrean God Roughpeak, I’m from the Three Realms as well!” Ning said hurriedly. His voice, filled with divine power, echoed outwards as he used his swords to block as he dodged.

“Eh?” The distant blur came to a halt, revealing an ashen-faced youth who was wielding a pair of bladewheels in his hands. He stared at Ning with a berserk look in his eyes. His eyes were vaguely bloodshot; clearly, he wasn’t disguising his murderous intent at all.

“Three Realms?” The ashen-faced youth snickered coldly, then growled, “Snowfiend, we’ve fought countless times by now, and you’ve also disguised yourself as an Empyrean God of the Three Realms on multiple occasions. Do you really think you’ll be able to fool me again?”

“Empyrean God Roughpeak,” Ning said hurriedly, “I really am from the Three Realms. I’m not this ‘Snowfiend’ person. Your master is Exalted Celestial Carefree of the Daoist Path, am I right?”

Ning was naturally able to recognize this person at a single glance.

The Three Realms only had so many Empyrean Gods and True Immortals to begin with, and Ning had actually spent time memorizing all of the thousands who had entered Undermoon Lake. Undermoon Lake’s world was filled with natural energy, and it also contained within it multiple types of stellar energy. Both divine power and ki could be replenished here. Although the density of the energy here couldn’t compare to that of the Three Realms, it was still more than enough to maintain life.

Thus, Empyrean God Roughpeak’s appearance hadn’t changed. His aura, however, had changed dramatically.

Roughpeak: A relaxed, carefree Empyrean God who always had a smile on his face. That’s what the report about him said. But the person Ning saw had an ashen face, bloodshot eyes, and was filled with a surging killing intent. Clearly, he had reached the point where his Dao-heart was unable to control his murderous impulses.

“Master?” The youth stared at Ning, frowning. “And who are you? I’ve never even met you.”

“I only began my training long after you entered Undermoon Lake, Empyrean God Roughpeak,” Ning said. “I am the disciple of Daofather Subhuti.”

Many people in the Three Realms now knew that Ning was Subhuti’s disciple, and so Subhuti no longer forbade Ning from telling it to others.

“Subhuti?” The youth laughed coldly, “I imagine you overheard a few things from many of the other Empyrean Gods who entered this place. Do you really think you’ll be able to fool me so easily?” But despite his words, the youth still didn’t move.

“My master resides within the Crescent world, within the Triscar Crescent Abode of Mount Innerheart,” Ning said hurriedly.

The youth frowned. Although many Empyrean Gods had indeed entered this place, it was true that few of them would have cause to discuss the Tristar Crescent Abode of Mount Innerheart.

“Your master is the Exalted Celestial Carefree. Exalted Celestial Carefree, back when you were still in the outside world, had a total of seventy-three disciples. These days, he has a total of seventy-six,” Ning said. “The eldest disciple of Exalted Celestial Carefree died during the Primordial Era. His name was True Immortal Riverloss. Exalted Celestial Carefree’s second disciple...”

Ning continued to speak, and the face of the youth quickly changed. His body actually began to tremble, and tears began to appear in his eyes.

“Ha...hahaha....” Tears flowed down the youth’s face as he laughed. “Hahaha...hahahaha...”

Ning slowly came to a halt. He stared quietly as Empyrean God Roughpeak cried and laughed at the same time. He could sense that Roughpeak had endured many things; this wild laughter was nothing more than a way to release some of his feelings.

“What is your name, junior apprentice-brother?” The youth finally came

to a halt, and he now looked towards Ning with a warm look in his eyes. Generally speaking, disciples of major powers that all belonged to the Daoist Path would sometimes refer to each other as ‘senior apprentice-brother’ or ‘junior apprentice-brother’; this was a fairly friendly way of referring to each other.

However, although Daofather Subhuti trained in both Buddhism and Daoism, he couldn’t really be considered a member of the Daoist Path. Clearly, Roughpeak felt extremely friendly towards this newcomer Empyrean God from the Three Realms, which is why he referred to Ning as ‘junior apprentice-brother’.

“My name is Darknorth. Respectful greetings to you, senior apprentice-brother Roughpeak,” Ning said.

“Junior apprentice-brother Darknorth.” The youth smiled, the tears having vanished from his eyes.

Chapter 9: Wall Carvings

Empyrean God Roughpeak said hurriedly, "I really am ashamed. Just now, I actually took you to be Snowfiend and immediately attacked you! Fortunately, you are very powerful, which is why I didn't injure you. If I was to have slain you...by the time I felt regret, it would be too late. Alas... I never would have thought that I, Roughpeak, would end up in a state where I would launch killing blows without even trying to ascertain the situation clearly." A hint of grief flickered in his eyes.

"You cannot be blamed, senior apprentice-brother." Ning smiled.

"But it truly is my fault. Forget it, enough of that for now." Roughpeak frowned as he looked at Ning. "Junior apprentice-brother Darknorth, you should know how dangerous Undermoon Lake is. Many Empyrean Gods have entered since the Primordial Era, but the only one to actually leave was Buddha Jueming. Why were you so foolish as to enter this place? Back then, I personally watched as Reverend Jueming ascended to become a Buddha. I was so incredibly bored that I ended up deciding to enter Undermoon Lake to try my luck. Countless years have passed since then. At first, other Empyrean Gods would enter this place, but it has been a long, long time since any have made the attempt. Why have you..."

"I am indeed the only one to enter in ten million years. As for the reason why I entered...that's a long and complicated story." Ning sighed. "I came because I was forced to by circumstances outside my control. I had to come here to procure a certain treasure."

Roughpeak nodded, then hurriedly asked, "Right, what's the situation in the Three Realms? Did you say that my master took on new disciples?"

"The Three Realms..." Ning hesitated for a moment. "...Has already been swept into a new storm!" Ning's voice was heavy, but he still forced the words out.

"Storm?" Roughpeak was surprised.

"One which might be even more brutal than the war which ended the Primordial Era." Ning nodded.

“How can that be possible? So many people died in the war that ended the Primordial Era...” Roughpeak was shocked and stunned.

“That time, Mother Nuwa broke through to the Pangu level, which is why we managed to avoid disaster. This time...well, listen to me explain in detail.” Ning didn’t hold anything back from this disciple of Exalted Celestial Carefree. If they all managed to survive, they would be on the same side, and so Ning told him almost everything about the storm that had embroiled the Three Realms.

The telling of this tale took a full hour.

Roughpeak stood there in a daze. He muttered to himself, “How could this have happened? After the Seamless Gate re-entered the Three Realms, everything was peaceful. Why is it that all of a sudden...” He paused. “This time, Mother Nuwa isn’t around to keep the peace. Nobody in our Nuwa Alliance is capable of countering the abilities of the Lord of All Fiends. However, the Seamless Gate will find it difficult to counter our leaders as well. The only result would be heavy losses on both sides. In the end, how many of us will possibly survive?”

When he had been in the Three Realms, the Three Realms had been in a state of peace. But now, the storm had descended upon it.

“Either the Seamless Gate dies or we die,” Ning said calmly. “There are no other choices. Although I am weak, I can still sense my subconscious whispering to me that one of our two sides has to be wiped out.”

“Even you can sense it?” Roughpeak was surprised.

“Yes.” Ning nodded.

“Why...why is destiny forcing a tribulation like this?” Roughpeak simply didn’t understand.

Tribulations and storms didn’t descend without a reason. The war that ended the Primordial Era, for example, was caused by two chaosworlds moving towards each other and colliding together. The Lord of the Demonheart wished to take over both worlds, but the Pangu Chaosworld resisted him. Thus, a great war erupted. In addition to that, the Lord of All

Things was manipulating things in secret.

The secret workings of fate would only reveal the results. The results in this case were that one side would definitely be wiped out. Only if one side was wiped out would the other side survive.

As for the reason for the storm? That was all left up to conjecture.

The Nuwa Alliance's guess was that it was very possible that this was all caused by the 'king' of the Seamless Gate. That 'king' had been very close to the Pangu level. He had merged himself into the Heavenly Daos, but since then he had slowly begun to awaken. Part of his consciousness was already awake. Through its partial control over the Heavenly Daos, it was providing intelligence reports to the Seamless Gate, giving them the power to fight back against the Nuwa Alliance.

This inevitably caused the Three Sovereigns and the leaders of Daoism and Buddhism to question if the Lord of the Demonheart had managed to escape the restrictions of the Heavenly Daos. Was he seeking to cause yet another storm?

Or was there perhaps yet another alien Outsider causing trouble from the shadows?

Or was there another, even more inscrutable reason?

It was hard to say.

The Lord of the Demonheart, who had merged himself into the Heavenly Daos, most likely knew the most...and his order had been to have the Seamless Gate assault the Nuwa Alliance!

"People on our level can't possibly learn the real reasons why this storm descended," Ning said. "In short...the Seamless Gate has already infiltrated the Three Realms and has begun to attack us. We can't let ourselves just be defeated without fighting back!"

"Right." Roughpeak nodded as well, a murderous look flashing through his eyes. "The Seamless Gate...only after Mother Nuwa left the Three Realms did the Lord of All Fiends sneak back. The only reason we let them join our Three Realms was because we didn't want to cause

unnecessary death. Who would've thought that...ugh. It's been so many years, but you just can't teach a dog not to eat shit."

Upon learning that both sides had begun a war of annihilation, Roughpeak naturally was going to stand on the side of the Nuwa Alliance.

"However, we're all trapped here at Undermoon Lake. There's no point in talking endlessly about these things." Roughpeak shook his head. He then turned his head towards the corridor and began to walk towards it. "Junior apprentice-brother Darknorth, follow me."

The two advanced through the corridor. A short while later, they arrived at the innermost courtyard to this palace. It was extremely quiet, as no sounds could be heard at all. Light reflected off the accumulated snow, making every inch of it easily visible.

"All these years, I've been living here." Roughpeak stepped into the courtyard.

Ning followed behind him. This courtyard was very plain and simple... but almost immediately, Ning's gaze was drawn to the walls of the courtyard.

"What's this?" Ning walked over, astonished. He couldn't help but stare at the diagrams and characters engraved onto the walls.

The diagrams were of close-combat techniques, while the characters were detailed descriptions and in the language of the Three Realms.

"These have been left behind since the Primordial Era by bored, trapped, and despairing Empyrean Gods." Roughpeak sat down on the ground, leaning against a tree trunk. "Junior apprentice-brother Darknorth, do you have any wine?"

"I do." Ning waved his hand, producing a gourd of wine and tossing it over.

"Excellent." Roughpeak's eyes lit up. He caught the gourd of wine, pulled open the stopper, then raised his head and began to guzzle it down. Only after finishing a barrel's worth all did he let out a long sigh of contentment. He then laughed loudly, "Wonderful. What a wonderful

feeling. It's been forever since I've had wine. I've been trapped here for so long without seeing even the shadow of another person, and I always have to be vigilant of that Snowfiend's attacks. Life really has been worse than death here."

"Junior apprentice-brother Darknorth, don't waste your time looking at that. There's no point." Roughpeak called out to Ning upon seeing Ning stare unblinkingly at the wall carvings. "They were all left behind by the Empyrean Gods that came to this place. In terms of quality, they naturally can't compare to that of the techniques which True Gods and Daofathers pass down. These were all left behind by Empyrean Gods who knew that they were going to die here, and so they left behind a few techniques so that future arrivals would see them and know that they had once lived here."

"Ugh, you just won't listen." Roughpeak, seeing that Ning continued to stare at the wall, no longer said anything. He just raised his head and continued to drink.

To be able to drink wine was already a tremendous blessing.

As for Ning, he just stared quietly at the many carvings on the wall.

"Snowleaf, subordinate of Buddha Maitreya, leaves behind his last words."

"Swordback, subordinate of the Lord of the Everwood, leaves behind his last words."

"Windbrother, subordinate of Wargod Xingtian, leaves behind his last words."

Some of these Empyrean Gods were quite famous, while others were low-key recluses. They had all come here, to the world of Undermoon Lake. Although they had managed to survive the yaksha, they were no unable to advance a single step past this place. They knew that their chances of surviving this palace were very low, and so they had left behind some words on this wall, telling future arrivals that they had once been here!

The techniques they had left behind naturally weren't that impressive, and of course Ning found them useless.

At the Empyrean God level, one would mainly rely on self-developed techniques. Ning, for example, had developed the [Brightmoon] sword-art, and they were quite formidable in his hands. But if he was to leave the [Brightmoon] sword-art on the wall carving, other Empyrean Gods wouldn't really care to learn it, as it was a technique developed by Ning for Ning; it wouldn't be very useful for others.

Even techniques created by True Gods and Daofathers wouldn't be that useful to them, unless the techniques were truly monstrous, unearthly techniques like the [Five Treasures] sword-art.

The reason why Ning was staring at the wall carvings was because he had the feeling that every single stroke and dotted line, every single character, represented a type of entrustment! These were all left behind by powerful Empyrean Gods prior to their deaths. This sort of faith and spiritual entrustment caused Ning's soul to quiver. He could sense that none of these Empyrean Gods wished to die. All of them wished to live! But alas...they didn't have the power to do so.

"I do not wish to leave behind any carvings." At some point in time, Roughpeak had walked to Ning's side, wine gourd in hand. He said calmly, "If I die, I die. I've had enough of this life."

Chapter 10: Snowfiend

“What’s wrong?” Ji Ning immediately asked.

Immortals and Fiendgods would generally be able to withstand the loneliness of solitude. The prisoners of Prisonworld 17, for example, had been trapped for multiple chaos cycles with only a small number committing suicide in despair. Empyrean God Roughpeak, by comparison, had been trapped here a far shorter period of time.

“Didn’t I tell you how I mistook you for ‘Snowfiend’ earlier?” Roughpeak said.

“Yes.” Ning nodded.

“Undermoon Lake is an exceptionally deadly place. Many years ago, I made my way past the sea yaksha and arrived here at this snowy island. When I first arrived, there were no other Empyrean Gods, and so I continued to advance,” Roughpeak said. “On the other side of this island, there is another floating wooden bridge. If you proceed past it, you’ll encounter Snowfiend.”

“I was unable to defeat Snowfiend. Fortunately, by relying on my agility techniques, I managed to escape and flee back to this snowy island,” Roughpeak said. “Snowfiend pursued me all the way back to this location, but once I fled into the island itself, Snowfiend immediately halted the pursuit.”

“Each time I fought against Snowfiend, I was unable to win. Thus, I have no choice but to remain here on this island.”

“I thought that I would be safe here, but I didn’t expect that after being here for a thousand years, one of Snowfiend’s clones actually attacked the island.” Roughpeak shook his head and sighed. “Every since that day, roughly every thousand years, a clone of Snowfiend would come to the island to attack me. Each time, its power is a little bit greater than it was before. After a million years, the clones will be close to its true body in power.”

Ning asked, puzzled, "Once every thousand years, with a gradual increase in power...is he doing this just to temper you, senior apprentice-brother?"

"This is indeed a form of tempering." Roughpeak nodded. "At first, the Snowfiend clones were fairly weak, and I was completely capable of withstanding them. After a million years, my agility techniques reached an extremely formidable level; even the clone that was comparable to Snowfiend at full power is unable to kill me."

"He's not able to kill me, but I'm not able to go past him either."

"And so, I've been trapped here on this island the entire time. Over the course of many years, other Empyrean Gods have come to this island. Some of them died to Snowfiend, while others made it to the next island. Some were like me, trapped here for long periods of time...but because the Snowfiend clones grew increasingly powerful, they were unable to keep up and ended up dying."

"I'm the only one left!"

Empyrean God Roughpeak shook his head and laughed. "In terms of power, many of them were actually my equal...but my forte lies in agility. Thanks to Snowfiend's pressure, I've reached a level that I would never have dared imagined I would reach."

"But what of it? Snowfiend continues to disturb me time and time again. He uses illusions, ambushes, assassination attempts...he continues to try to kill me." Roughpeak let out a sigh. "I'm here, all by myself, and I'm unable to improve any further at all. I'm also unable to make it past Snowfiend...and I have to be wary of his attacks."

"Even if I'm not killed, I'll eventually suffer a mental collapse," Roughpeak said.

Ning nodded slowly.

"Senior apprentice-brother Roughpeak," Ning said solemnly, "I feel that Undermoon Lake is quite a strange place. Based on what I've seen, it should be a world that was created by an ancient major power. After we

enter, we will be beset by a number of trials. If we are unable to endure the trials, we will die. If we can endure them, we will be allowed to proceed, eventually acquiring treasures and even being allowed to leave.”

“Is it possible that the major power who created Undermoon Lake did so in order to help cultivate juniors, giving us treasures then letting us leave?” Ning was puzzled.

“He’s not as nice as you think.” Roughpeak shook his head. “The major power who created Undermoon Lake definitely had schemes of his own.”

“Agreed. Nobody is as selfless as that.” Ning agreed as well.

To help train Empyrean Gods, producing top-tier ones that would be gifted with treasures and allowed to leave...that was an act of utter selflessness. Ning didn’t think that anybody would be that selfless. There had to be a reason behind it all!

“Can it be that Buddha Jueming has never said anything at all, despite so many years having passed?” Roughpeak asked.

“Nothing.” Ning shook his head. “I asked my master, and my master also told me that Buddha Jueming sealed his lips, saying nothing about this place. It doesn’t matter who asks. Even Lord Tathagata the Buddha was unable to convince Buddha Jueming to divulge any information about Undermoon Lake.”

Roughpeak frowned. “How odd. Why is Buddha Jueming so completely closemouthed about this place?”

Buddha Jueming refused to speak, but he also refused to prevent other Empyrean Gods from entering this place. Still...no one could force him to speak.

“Snowfiend’s continuously attempted to kill me. In fact, he’s even chatted with me several times. That’s why I’ve learned that there is only one method of surviving Undermoon Lake and leaving with treasures,” Roughpeak said.

Ning immediately listened carefully.

“The method is...to continuously advance through the floating bridges, defeating all guardians. The journey will see you go past a total of five islands. Once you reach the fifth island, you’ll be able to depart in peace. However, to date only Buddha Jueming has succeeded,” Roughpeak said.

“Five islands?” Ning was stunned.

The snow-covered island the two of them were on was merely the very first island. To reach the fifth island would be no easy feat.

“Upon reaching the fifth island, you’d most likely learn what the creator of Undermoon Lake has been scheming,” Roughpeak said.

“Right.” Ning nodded.

In truth, Ning didn’t really care as to what that ancient major power was scheming. What he cared about was Iceheart Pith and Iceheart Leaf.

“Junior apprentice-brother, I’ve battled against Snowfiend for countless years, and I’ve also chatted with him many times.” Roughpeak looked at Ning. “He told me that there’s one other way to survive and leave.”

“Oh?” Ning’s eyes lit up.

“To hide within an extremely powerful Empyrean God’s magic treasure.” Roughpeak continued, “For example...if someone felt tremendous faith in Buddha Jueming, they could’ve chosen to secrete themselves in his treasures, assuming he was willing to let them do so. Upon him successfully leaving the place, they would be able to leave along his side.”

“However, there’s one bad part about hiding; you won’t be able to acquire any treasures at all. In addition, your own life will no longer be yours to control.” Roughpeak continued, “For example, if Buddha Jueming was to die, then the Empyrean Gods hiding within his treasures would all die as well. After all, they would all emerge upon his death, and anyone capable of killing Buddha Jueming would also be capable of killing them.”

Ning nodded.

“Right now, I’m trying to decide...if I should follow you.” Roughpeak

looked towards Ning.

Ning was startled. "Follow me?"

"Follow you. I'll go wherever you go, as far as you go. If you manage to escape, I will as well. However, I feel that your chances of making it out alive are quite low." Roughpeak chuckled. "Still, I want to at least take a look at the other islands. Even making it to just the second island would be enough. I've been here all by myself for so long...I've had enough of it."

"Senior apprentice-brother, if you truly were to trust me in such a way, I would definitely do my utmost," Ning said.

"But I'm worried about something..." Roughpeak said.

"What's that?"

"I'm worried about whether you are strong enough to go past Snowfiend," Roughpeak laughed. "If you fail and die, I'll probably be unable to escape as I'll be trapped in your treasures. I'll end up being killed by Snowfiend. If that happens, I won't be able to see the next island. I've been quite curious as to what the rest of the five islands are like, and how terrifying the upcoming dangers are, for so many Empyrean Gods to have failed here."

Ning hesitated momentarily. "I...can't make any promises."

"I don't need any promises. Follow me." Roughpeak led Ning forward.

The snowy island was quite large, but the two of them moved with incredible speed. Soon, they arrived at the other end of the island, where they saw a floating wooden bridge.

"Eh?" Ning took a good look. This wooden bridge stretched off into the distant horizon, but the endless sea to each side of it was completely frozen.

Countless petals of snow continued to fall down from the skies.

"All you need to do is step on the wooden bridge." Roughpeak gestured towards the bridge. "Once you step onto it, Snowfiend will sense it. There's no need for you to even advance; you can just wait here for him. A

short while later, Snowfiend will arrive! The first 'Snowfiend' you encounter will merely be a clone. Fight it. If you can kill it with just a single blow, I'll take the gamble and hide inside your treasures, following you forward."

"Junior apprentice-brother." Roughpeak bowed deeply towards Ning.

"Senior apprentice-brother, don't act like this!" Ning hurriedly moved to stop the bow.

"I'm asking you to help me advance, but I'm first insisting on testing out your power. I honestly am ashamed of my actions," Roughpeak said.

"This is just normal behavior," Ning said hurriedly. "If I can't even dispose of one of Snowfiend's clones, for you to follow me would be suicidal."

Roughpeak no longer said anything else to Ning. He just stared at the vast sea, at the distant horizons. He murmured softly to himself, "I really wonder what the next island is like. I wonder if there are any other surviving Empyrean Gods on that island. I really want to know what's there. Once I see it...even if I die, I'd be happy."

As for Ning, he moved forward, stepping onto the wooden bridge.

Whoosh! As soon as he stepped onto the wooden bridge, the amount of snow falling from the heavens grew noticeably greater.

A pair of blood-red swords appeared in Ning's hands as he began to wait quietly.

.....

Far away in the distant skies, a large amount of snow began to rapidly condense, transforming into a white-furred ape. The ape held a snow-white staff in his hands, and he stood there in midair, his gaze passing through the endless snowfall and falling upon the distant Ji Ning and Roughpeak.

"Yet another youngster has arrived." The ape-like Snowfiend murmured softly to himself, "Judging from their words...that kid Roughpeak is no

longer able to endure the solitude of being trapped here for so many words. He plans to take a chance on following the white-robed kid?"

"It's rare for someone to accompany for so long. If it wasn't for Master's orders, I'd be fine with letting you leave. But alas...although Master has left, his orders remain. I must follow them." The simian Snowfiend shook his head.

Whoosh. Snowfiend disappeared.

.....

Ning's face changed slightly as he looked towards the front. A large amount of snow had begun to rapidly condense in front of him.

"Be careful, junior apprentice-brother. Snowfiend's clone has arrived," Roughpeak warned him from behind.

Ning just watched calmly. As the snow began to condense, a large amount of natural energy began to condense as well. Soon, a white-furred ape wielding a snow-white staff appeared before him. The ape's eyes were filled with an innate killing intent; it was born for the sole purpose of slaughter.

"Heh heh heh. That kid Roughpeak has quite the agility technique; he's been able to slip through my hands time and time again. However, nearly a thousand other Empyrean Gods have died by my hands." The simian Snowfiend stared at Ning, seeming to weigh Ning with his eyes as a predator would its prey.

Ning didn't dare to be too reckless. All of the Empyrean Gods capable of making it past the sea yaksha were extraordinary figures, but a thousand of them still ended up dying by Snowfiend's hands. Although Ning had sparred for only a brief moment with Roughpeak, he could still tell that in terms of agility, he was far from being Roughpeak's match.

"Don't disappoint me." The ape-like Snowfiend let out a strange, chortling laugh that reverberated in the skies, then charged straight towards Ning with a 'swoosh', both hands clutched onto that snow-white staff.

Chapter 11: Taiji-force

As the staff came smashing down, countless snowflakes swirled around it, causing its power to increase explosively!

Ji Ning just stood there quietly as Snowfiend's blow descended towards him.

Empyrean God Roughpeak had said it himself; this was merely one of Snowfiend's clones. If Ning could destroy this clone in one blow, Roughpeak would follow him. In his heart, Ning wished to help out this 'senior apprentice-brother' of his. His wife's master, Patriarch Lu Dongbin, could actually be considered a fellow disciple of Roughpeak's.

Lu Dongbin had once apprenticed himself to two of the major powers of the Daoist Path. One was Daoist Three Purities; the other was Exalted Celestial Carefree.

For the sake of his connection to Lu Dongbin alone, Ning would've been willing to give Roughpeak a hand. But of course, Roughpeak's status was far lower than Lu Dongbin's. Even as far back as the Primordial Era, Lu Dongbin was viewed as one of the most peerless of geniuses. But alas, his ambitions in dual-cultivating in Buddhism and Taoism were too great. It wasn't until the Three Realms was swept into this current storm that he was finally able to make his breakthrough, but upon doing so he instantly became a top-tier Daofather.

Whoosh. The staff came smashing downwards.

Swish! Ning's sword-light flashed. As soon as he used his sword, he executed the [Starseizing Hand], causing his sword to be filled with tremendous power. "This Snowfiend clone is far too slow." The strange, unfathomable sword-light flashed, and it was about to land against Snowfiend, except...Snowfiend's longstaff suddenly spun around, moving to block Ning's sword.

"Eh?" Ning's face changed slightly, and he sent the longsword forward in a stabbing motion, following the momentum of the blow.

Stab! The tip of the sword pierced straight through the skull of Snowfiend's clone.

[Brightmoon] sword-art, Blood Drop stance.

Whoosh. Snowfiend's clone completely dispersed, transforming back into the snow that filled the skies. At the same time, Snowfiend's voice echoed forth throughout the region. "If that's all the power you have...you aren't even close to being strong enough to pass. Haha...I'll be waiting for you on the path ahead."

Empyrean God Roughpeak walked to Ning. "What do you think?"

"I underestimated him," Ning said. "His clone only had an ordinary amount of power and speed; I thought I'd be able to easily kill him with one blow of my sword. Who would've thought that his staff-techniques would be so formidable? I had to spend a little bit of effort on him after all."

Roughpeak nodded. "The clones of the sea yaksha that were all very weak; they could be effortlessly killed. But the clones of Snowfiend are far harder to deal with. As for his true form, it's even more powerful. His greatest strength is that he has almost no weaknesses at all. Or perhaps he does have weaknesses...but I wasn't able to discover any."

"Almost no weaknesses?" Ning frowned.

"Don't worry. You don't have to actually defeat him; so long as you have reached a certain level of power, he'll voluntarily withdraw and let you pass." Roughpeak chuckled, "Just now, you were able to kill Snowfiend's clone in one exchange, and your sword-art appeared quite impressive. I'll follow you."

Ning nodded.

In truth, strictly speaking Ning didn't really just use a single technique; he had first used the 'Shadowless' stance, then transformed it into the 'Blood Drop' stance. The reason why Roughpeak described it all as being 'one exchange' was because he truly could no longer endure the loneliness of being trapped in this place.

“Let’s go.” Ning waved his hand. Roughpeak didn’t resist, allowing himself to be drawn into Ning’s Immortal estate.

Ning himself was carrying a Pure Yang Immortal estate that held his other body within it. But of course, as the master of the estate, Ning was able to separate it into many different ‘sections’. For now, he didn’t wish to let Roughpeak know of his second body’s existence. There were very few in the Three Realms who knew this secret.

Whoosh.

Ning boarded the Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle, then continued to advance along the path set by the wooden bridge.

Snowflakes drifted downwards, seeming to cover the entire world.

“What a beautiful scene.” Ning smiled.

He continuously advanced. After two full hours, the Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle came to a sudden halt, and Ning’s face changed slightly as he stared up ahead. Far off in the distance, a golden-furred ape was seated atop the bridge. In front of the golden-furred ape was placed a long staff that emanated a tremendous aura of power as well. Clearly, this was an extremely formidable treasure. At present, the golden-furred ape was seated in the lotus position, resting his jaw against his arms, waiting for Ning in an extremely bored-looking manner.

“You finally came. I waited forever for you.” The golden-furred ape rose to his feet, stretching slightly. “That flying treasure of yours is far too slow.”

With but a thought, Ning dismissed his Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle, landing atop the wooden bridge. A pair of blood-red swords in his hands, he stared at the distant form of Snowfiend. “Although Snowfiend’s true aura is far more powerful than his clone’s aura, it feels as though his aura isn’t even as strong as the aura of the true body of the sea yaksha.”

“Heh heh heh...what’s wrong? Are you wondering why my aura seems fairly weak?” Snowfiend laughed mockingly. “Don’t compare that sea yaksha to me; that idiot isn’t even able to fully control all of his power.

All he has is brute force. I, however, am in complete control of every shred of my power. Once I withdraw my aura, I can change my aura, change my appearance, change everything.”

“Transform!”

Snowfiend’s appearance suddenly transformed into that of Roughpeak’s.

“Again!” This time he transformed into Ning. The aura was completely identical.

Ning, seeing this, was quite startled. This was equivalent to the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art]!

“Thus, kid...you should understand that true experts can’t be judged based on their looks,” Snowfiend said with a laugh. “The more powerful one is, the more they will generally choose to restrain their auras. In fact, they might appear like an ordinary person, giving off no aura of danger at all.”

Ning couldn’t help but nod.

It was true. For example, when he had encountered Old Man Yuan, Old Man Yuan had transformed himself into an ordinary-looking old gardener. Ning truly had thought him to be nothing more than an ordinary mortal, and he truly had sensed no aura around him at all.

“Come. Let’s see what you’ve got. Show me what you have,” Snowfiend called out.

“Come out.” A fierce light flashed through Ning’s eyes, and a total of 729 Pure Yang swords appeared around him, hovering in the air. A large amount of Immortal energy had been pumped into them, and the energy was cycled through them, transforming into an incomparably sharp jade sword that materialized in front of Ning.

“Oh, it seems you have some skill after all.” Snowfiend hefted his golden staff, chortling merrily.

Ning’s eyelids twitched.

Swish!

The jade sword instantly pierced through the skies, leaving behind a streak of light as it chopped towards Snowfiend in an unfathomable, unpredictable manner.

Boom! Snowfiend gently flicked out his golden staff, smashing it against the jade sword. The jade sword instantly shattered.

“Eh?” Ning’s face changed. “Go, go, go!” One jade sword after another materialized and soared off.

Snowfiend just lazily advanced, his golden staff casually trembling with each blow. The staff transformed into a layer of concentric circles, effortlessly smashing apart each seemingly ‘unfathomable’ jade sword. Boom! Boom! Boom! All three were broken apart in succession.

“Is this the only technique you know?!” Snowfiend stared wide-eyed, seemingly befuddled. “Then this is going to be really boring.”

After speaking, Snowfiend’s golden staff suddenly flew into the air, transforming into a golden streak of light.

“My ‘Shadowless’ stance is inscrutable and mysterious, and it was backed by the power of the ninth-stage [Greater Thousand Swords Formation]. And yet, he was able to effortlessly deflect it. It seems I’ll have to use heartforce.” Ning didn’t expect that he would immediately be forced to use heartforce. Yet another jade sword appeared in front of him, and yet another streak of light flashed out, chopping towards Snowfiend.

Snowfiend leapt forward, and the jade sword stabbed through the air.

The two collided.

“Die!” Ning willed it, and the heartforce within the jade sword instantly burst forth, causing the speed and power of the jade sword to increase dramatically, making it even faster and more unpredictable as it chopped towards Snowfiend.

“Eh?” For the first time, Snowfiend revealed a solemn look on his face. Prior to this, he had been holding the staff with one hand, but now he instantly switched to a two-handed grip.

Whoosh! The staff trembled, causing circles to instantly appear in the skies. Two calm streams of black energy and white energy appeared on the surface of the staff.

Boom!

The staff once more smashed against Ning's jade sword...and despite adding fourth-stage heartforce to the mix, the sword was still completely shattered.

"Interesting." Snowfiend's eyes lit up. "Ahahaha, let's do it again! Agai!"

Snowfiend's body bounded forward at high speed. As he ran forward, his movements became strange and unfathomable. He occasionally moved left and occasionally moved right, advancing nonstop in a zig-zag pattern.

Clearly, Snowfiend was taking things seriously now.

"He was able to stop even fourth-stage heartforce?" Ning felt a hint of surprise. Every time he applied heartforce, he used up a good amount of his energy. He would only be able to unleash a total of ten such swords.

"Go, go, go!" Ning gritted his teeth. Once more, he shot out three jade swords. This time, only one of them was filled with fourth-stage heartforce as he mixed 'real' attacks with 'fake' attacks.

"Ahahaha..." Snowfiend roared with laughter.

Boom! Boom! Boom!!!

Three consecutive explosions. Although one of the jade swords suddenly increased dramatically in power, it was still completely smashed apart.

"What?!" Ning could instantly tell that this would be tough.

By now, Snowfiend had already closed in on Ning. With no time for anything else, Ning immediately put away his Pure Yang swords while manifesting his three-headed, six-armed form. Six swords in his hands, he charged forward to meet Snowfiend in combat.

Clang!!!

The staff was filled with tremendous power. As soon as their attacks

clashed, Ning was knocked flying backwards.

“What tremendous strength.” Ning flew backwards, his back smashing directly against the frozen sea. With a boom, the frozen sea trembled from the collision, but it remained completely undamaged. As for Ning, he rolled backwards a considerable distance before once more flying forward.

“If I don’t use the [Starseizing Hand], I probably can’t compete against him in raw strength.” Ning could feel a headache coming.

The [Starseizing Hand] used up divine power at a tremendous rate. [Three Heads, Six Arms] allowed him to increase his power significantly; given that he had six swords against the enemy’s single golden staff, he thought that he would at least be able to give the ape a run for his money, perhaps even winning. Who would’ve thought that he would be smashed backwards in their first exchange?

“Although he’s not as strong as the true form of the sea yaksha, he’s still much stronger than me. His staff-technique is also unfathomably profound, and his movement techniques are shockingly brilliant as well. He truly is virtually flawless. Senior apprentice-brother Roughpeak was actually able to escape Snowfiend through his evasion techniques...that’s quite impressive.” Only now did Ning truly understand how impressive Empyrean God Roughpeak’s evasive techniques were.

“I have to make use of my advantages.”

Ning had no choice but to engage in a bit of scheming now.

“Haha!” Snowfiend roared with laughter, charging forward onto the floating bridge and ramming straight towards Ning, who was still standing atop the frozen sea.

Ning continued to wield six swords in his three-headed, six-armed form. Once Snowfiend reached him, he moved.

Ning completely ignored the oncoming blow, sending all six of his swords smashing downwards towards Snowfiend’s body. You want to hit me? Hit all you like. Thanks to my [Eight-Nine Arcane Art], I can

completely ignore your attacks. As long as my swords can chop you to death, I'll win.

For the sake of success, Ning even used the [Starseizing Hand], allowing all six of his arms to explode with terrifying power.

“Ahahaha...”

The staff in Snowfiend's hands suddenly twisted about, and the two streams of black energy and white energy once more appeared, forming an enormous vortex that trapped all six of Ning's swords. And then, Snowfiend's staff came smashing viciously towards Ning!

BOOM! The staff smashed away the six swords, then smashed down upon Ning's body. Ning was once more knocked flying backwards, and he once more struck the frozen sea. This time, with a series of shattering sounds, a large number of cracks appeared on the icy surface.

Chapter 12: Swordforce, Stage Four

“How can he be so fast? My sword-arts are already quite fast, and I used six swords to launch six simultaneous attacks...but he was able to block them all.” After slamming into the frozen sea, Ji Ning quickly flew back into the air, his eyes filled with disbelief. Just now, he had used the [Starseizing Hand] with all six of his arms, but he was still easily smashed away by his foe.

The difference in power between the two made Ning feel quite miserable.

“Heartforce. In the end, it’s still an ephemeral, invisible form of energy.”

“In close combat, strength is just one aspect; combat techniques matters even more.” Ning sighed in his heart. He was able to see long ago that this Snowfiend was in control of taiji-force, and his battle-techniques were also incomparably profound. Ning’s own swordforce had merely reached the third stage; clearly, his [Brightmoon] sword-art, in terms of technique, was completely outmatched by his enemy’s staff-arts.

The difference in combat skill was simply too great. Even with three heads and six arms, Ning was still at a complete disadvantage.

“Ahahaha, come, come, come! Again!” Snowfiend was growing excited, and he twirled the golden staff in his hands, sending it howling forth once more.

As for Ning, he charged forward as well, once more entering the fray.

Clang! Clang! Clang! Boom! Boom! Boom!

The two battled wildly over the frozen sea. Every so often, Ning would be bashed backwards, but thanks to the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art] he was able to continue exchanging blows with his foe. He had to keep the [Starseizing Hand] maintained the entire time, as otherwise his swords would instantly be knocked flying upon contact with the enemy. The difference in raw strength was simply too great; only by using the [Starseizing Hand] was he able to maintain parity.

Every so often, Ning would let his heartforce explode forth as well! This would cause Snowfiend's body to suffer some wounds as well, but Snowfiend's body was capable of transforming into countless flakes of snow, then reforming; those light wounds were completely useless.

"Interesting. You are actually capable of suddenly exploding forth with great power in a way which even I cannot detect. Is this the legendary, invisible, formless power of heartforce?" Snowfiend continued his attacks while chatting with Ning, who just gritted his teeth and fought back.

This was the first time that he had found himself completely outclassed by someone who was on his own level of power. In strength, in agility, in technique...he was at a disadvantage in every single aspect.

"Faster. Faster!"

"The [Five Treasures] manual was correct when it said that upon reaching an unstoppable level of speed, one's attacks will become completely unstoppable."

"When the Golden Crow 'Emperor of Monsters' reached maximum speed, none of the major powers of the Primordial Era were able to do anything to him; in the end, Houyi had to use a special arrow to slay him. If I can make my sword fast enough, he'll be unable to stop me!" Ning attacked frantically, completely ignore defense and focusing solely on offense. The two stances he used were 'Shadowless' and 'Blood Drop'.

Although there were three attacking stances in the [Brightmoon] sword-art, Heavenbreaker primarily relied on crushing with weight and power. The difference in strength between Ning and Snowfiend was simply too great; Snowfiend's own primary skill revolved around using overwhelming power in each staff-smash! For Ning to use the Heavenbreaker stance to fight head-on would be a foolish choice; he would be using his weakness to combat the enemy's strength. He would lose disastrously if he did this.

Shadowless stance. Blood Drop stance.

His attacks were occasionally drifting and bizarre, occasionally rapid and savage. With three heads and six arms, he wildly launched attacks,

attacks, and even more attacks!

Faster, faster, faster!

Snowfiend himself continued to twirl that golden staff, the two streams of black and white energy flowing around it in a series of circles that completely shut down all of Ning's attacks.

"I'm still not fast enough."

Ning's six swords emanated a natural, blurry golden light. This light was truly breathtaking and dominating, but no matter how valiantly and savagely Ning fought his attacks continued to be dispersed by the seemingly-ordinary staff techniques.

After fighting for a long period of time, Ning's divine power was close to being depleted.

"It seems you still aren't good enough." Snowfiend chuckled to himself, his staff completely suppressing Ning.

As for Ning, he continued to launch attacks at a frenetic pace. Suddenly...one of the six swords exploded forth with shocking amounts of power.

"Heartforce yet again?" Snowfiend didn't feel any concern at all. Although this sword-strike of Ning's was even stranger and more unfathomable than before, and although his sword had managed to draw close to Snowfiend's body due to the sudden increase in power, Snowfiend was still able to clip the side of Ning's sword with his staff, knocking it aside. Ning was only able to leave a slash on Snowfiend's flank.

However, right at this moment, one of Ning's hands suddenly released a sword. The hand suddenly increased in size as it clawed towards Snowfiend.

This attack was simply too sudden. The heartforce-filled sword had been nothing more than a decoy; Ning's true goal was to ensure that this hand of his would be able to close in on the enemy! In the same instant that the sword's attack 'failed', Ning released the sword and let his hand become his true weapon.

“Eh?” Shocked, Snowfiend hurriedly moved backwards. His movement techniques were quite marvelous as well, and Ning’s clawing attack was only able to latch onto one of Snowfiend’s arms.

“Sever!” Snowfiend let out an uncaring chortle. He was formed from snow, and his body could manifest or dissipate as he willed it. The loss of an arm was nothing to him.

One of his arms had been seized by Ning, but the other sword continued to wield the long staff and battle against Ning’s other five swords.

BOOM!

A bloody sword-tip suddenly pierced out of Snowfiend’s forehead.

Snowfiend revealed a look of shock. He...he had actually been stabbed in the head?

Whoosh.

Moments later, Snowfiend’s body completely dissipated, reforming off to the side a few moments later. He stared in disbelief at the direction from which he had been attacked; a second Ji Ning was standing there!

“Two?” Snowfiend stared at the two white-robed Ji Nings.

“Just now, when you released your sword and grabbed me, it was all for the sake of giving your other clone a chance?” Snowfiend looked at Ning.

“Yes.” Ning nodded. “You are indeed strong enough to outmatch me; I’m not your equal at all. Thus, I had to play a small trick on you.”

“First, you filled your sword with heartforce, then you released the sword to attack me with your hand. That hand of yours is no weaker than your sword,” Snowfiend said.

“Correct. To be precise, my hand is actually a bit more powerful,” Ning said.

Ning’s [Starseizing Hand] had made his hands comparable to supreme Protocosmic spirit-treasures. Although they weren’t sword-shaped, they were still comparable in might to high-grade Protocosmic swords. Naturally, his hands would be a bit more powerful than the swords he

was using.

“Although my palms are a bit more powerful, and although my attack came quite suddenly, your agility techniques are simply too impressive; I was only able to grab onto your arm.” Ning shook his head.

“You released the sword so that you could attack with your hand, but even if the hand succeeded, you would still have the option of using your second body, which is just as strong as your first body.” Snowfiend shook his head. “I was tied down by you for a moment; that sudden attack caught me offguard, rendering me unable to dodge. I am thoroughly convinced by my defeat.”

“I wasn’t strong enough, so I had no choice but to use trickery,” Ning said.

If he had started the battle with two clones, the ape would’ve been prepared for it. Given how overwhelmingly powerful Snowfiend was, if that happened the outcome could be summarized in one word: LOSE.

Thus, Ning’s second clone would only appear at a critical moment, unleashing a sudden attack that would gain him victory.

“It was because you have other clones.” Snowfiend shook his head. “You actually have two true bodies, and both are Empyrean God bodies. It seems that you must’ve trained in some sort of special divine ability. Generally speaking, this sort of divine ability should allow you to create quite a few clones, correct?”

Ning chuckled. Indeed; [Taowu Eighteen Fiendgods] allowed for a total of eighteen clones.

“You win.” Snowfiend hefted the golden staff onto his shoulders, then turned and left. Snow fluttered around him, and he quickly disappeared into the snow.

Ning let out a sigh of relief. “Good heavens.” Ning felt a spike of fear for what had almost happened.

“Although I knew that Snowfiend had to be powerful...he was way too powerful! I threw everything I had at him, and my first clone used up

almost all of its divine power and heartforce. If my final ploy had failed, my only option would've been to try and flee back to the island."

The reason why Ning had battled ineffectively for so long as to make the ape 'accustomed' too him. Everything lay in that final attack.

First the sword, then the hand, then the second clone! If he failed, he would've fled back to the island. Just like Roughpeak, he would train for a few more years before making any further attempts.

"Success! Finally, I succeeded."

Although Ning celebrated his victory, he still felt a sense of pressure. This journey involved a total of five islands; his defeat of Snowfiend only allowed him access to the second island. This battle, however, had already forced him to reveal his trump card and use all the tricks he had available. Would he be able to overcome the upcoming challenges?

Whoosh.

The Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle followed the floating wooden bridge, rapidly advancing towards the horizon.

While flying, Ning pondered the previous battle nonstop. Just now, when he had been battling so frantically, he had a vague feeling that he was about to completing the third chapter of the [Five Treasures] sword-art, which he was still a hairs-breadth away from mastering. However, because he was in a life-and-death battle, he didn't have any time to think about the sword-art.

Now, Ning began to think back to the previous battle and carefully analyze it.

After flying for half a day, another island appeared before Ning. This island had a massive volcano in the center of it. Boom! Boom! Boom! The volcano constantly belched forth lava and ash, sending them flying into the skies and turning the entire island red.

"A volcano island?" Ning no longer pondered his sword-arts. Instead, he rapidly flew forward and landed atop the volcano island.

This was the second of the five islands.

“Eh?”

At the end of the wooden bridge, Ning sat a giant, vertical stone stele, with the stone stele covered by an enormous diagram of a bellowing ape. This ape looked rather similar to Snowfiend, and he was roaring at the heavens.

As soon as Ning saw it, his mind was drawn into the diagram's depths.

He saw the illusion of an ape, twirling a longstaff in its hands as it trained in a staff technique. The ape started with the simplest techniques, then proceeded to the advanced ones, his staffwork growing increasingly marvelous. A short while ago, Ning had battled against Snowfiend for a long period of time. Now that he was able to carefully see each of the illusory ape's separate techniques in detail, he instantly felt enlightened regarding his previous experiences. Only after a long period of time did the display of techniques come to an end.

“Eh?” Ning's consciousness returned to his body.

“What a marvelous staff technique. A pity that my path is the Dao of the Sword.” But suddenly, Ning's entire body turned stiff as he just stood there blankly.

He had been trapped at a bottleneck in the [Five Treasures] for some time now. Upon viewing that complete staff technique, it was as though a ray of sunlight had suddenly pierced through a covering of dark stormclouds, illuminating a world that had previously been cast in shadow.

Ning stood there silently and unmovingly. Both him and his second clone were completely absorbed in the [Five Treasures] sword-art. They were gaining continuous insights into the third chapter, and in the end the bottleneck was no longer able to impede Ning's progress. The bottleneck shattered, and all of his insights became completely linked together, merging to form a perfect whole. The entire third chapter was completely mastered...and Ning's swordforce silently advanced to the fourth stage as well.

Swordforce, stage one - Silver Moon.

Swordforce, stage two - Dazzling Sun.

Swordforce, stage three - Imperial Ruler.

Swordforce, stage four - Sword Heart.

“Sword Heart...” Ning murmured to himself, then flicked out with his finger in a slow arc. A black streak of sword-light appeared, swirling around it.

When he had created the very first stance of the [Brightmoon] sword-art, Ning had already reached the third stage of swordforce. Nearly a century had passed, and over the course of this period of time Ning had completed the [Brightmoon] sword-art, battled against many Empyrean Gods and Celestial Immortals in the prisonworld, and even sparred against True Gods and True Immortals there. However, he had been unable to make that final breakthrough. Only after sparring against Snowfiend and after his consciousness was drawn into the stone stele did he finally break through the last bottleneck and reach the fourth stage of swordforce.

Chapter 13: Volcano Island

“The Dao of the Sword...” Ji Ning shut his eyes.

Slowly, an invisible surge of power began to manifest in the area around Ning. It formed into the blurry image of a black sword which covered Ning and swirled around him.

Normally, those who mastered the Dao of the Sword would be referred to as Sword Immortals...but this was actually just the beginning of the Sword Immortal path! Only by comprehending swordforce would one be able to pursue the true essence of the sword itself.

“It is alive.” Ning opened his eyes, staring at the blurry, illusory black sword around him. This manifestation of fourth-stage swordforce allowed Ning to clearly sense the childish playfulness of the illusory sword. It was like a little child that absolutely loved to stick closely to Ning, causing Ning’s own heart to be filled with joy.

Sentience. Life.

The first three stages of swordforce only involved the rigid application of power, but the fourth stage of swordforce actually gained both life and sentience. Although the level of intelligence was very low, it was still enough to truly stun Ning.

Prior to this, before his heartforce had actually reached the fourth stage, Ning had never sensed this from his swordforce. As for heartforce, it came from himself; it was the power of his own heart. Swordforce, however, came from an arcane, inexplicable, unfathomable essence of the sword itself. The path that Ning was pursuing was the path of finding the original essence of the sword.

Whoosh.

Ning rose to his feet. He waved his hand, and the black swordforce responded accordingly.

“Such tremendous power. Prior to this, I was a bit weaker than senior apprentice-brother Silvermoon and Redsnow, due to me not having

trained for long enough. Although my heartforce is formidable, it's consumed far too quickly in battle. When I want to beat down on those weaker than me, it'll allow me to gain victory in just one or two blows, but when fighting against experts of the same level, it simply won't last. Swordforce, however, doesn't use up any divine power, and it comes in a steady, unbroken stream." Ning was absolutely delighted.

Upon truly comprehending swordforce, even a mortal commoner would be able to infuse his punches and kicks with fourth-stage swordforce.

"I can vaguely sense that the power of this swordforce is roughly equal to 80% of the power unleashed when I use my heartforce to maximum effect." Ning sighed in amazement. Although it was 'only' 80%, it could be used in every single strike and blow; in a protracted battle, it would be far more useful to Ning than heartforce would be.

"From this day forth, in a one-on-one battle, I am now the equal of senior apprentice-brother Silvermoon and Redsnow."

After calming himself, Ning took a look at the volcanic island. This island had a towering volcano in the center that was occasionally belching forth plumes of lava. However, because the sea around the volcanic island was completely frozen with countless snowflakes falling all around it, the borders of the volcanic island were at a perfect temperature, with only the volcano itself being blazingly hot.

Whoosh. Ning willed it, and a second person appeared next to him. It was Empyrean God Roughpeak.

"Junior apprentice-brother Darknorth." Roughpeak immediately smiled and called out to Ning upon stepping out...but upon seeing his surroundings, he was instantly stunned.

The volcano belching fire...

It was a sight completely different from that of the snowy island.

"Th-this place is..." Roughpeak stuttered.

"This is the second island. I call it 'Volcano Island'," Ning said.

“You actually su-succeeded. Ahahaha...wonderful! Wonderful!” Roughpeak turned his head to look at Ning with eyes full of excitement. “Junior apprentice-brother Darknorth, to tell you the truth, I didn’t really think you’d be able to succeed. In fact, after spending a few days in your Immortal estate, I was truly afraid that you had already failed. But you actually succeeded! Wonderful, simply wonderful.”

Roughpeak truly didn’t have that much faith in Ning. He had watched as Ning killed the Snowfiend clone on the snowy island, and had seen that Ning’s sword-arts were only at the level of third-stage swordforce. However, Ning’s sword was quite shockingly fast, which was why he thought that there might be a chance that he would be acknowledged by Snowfiend! It wasn’t necessary to actually defeat Snowfiend in order to go past him; if one fought him for long enough and was acknowledged by him, one would be allowed past.

Ning had spent a long period of time analyzing the stone stele. Although Ning had felt that only a brief moment had passed, in truth he had spent more than two days on it.

After waiting for so long within the Immortal estate, Roughpeak felt that the reason why Snowfiend had let Ning pass was because the two had fought for so long that Snowfiend had acknowledged Ning’s power.

Ning chuckled. “Luck was part of it.”

“Being able to pass Snowfiend proves your power.” Roughpeak sighed. “No matter what...we’ve finally left the island of snow. I’ve had more than enough of that place.”

“The island was actually quite pretty,” Ning said.

“When you’ve spent countless terrified years by yourself in one place, it’ll turn into hell for you, no matter how ‘pretty’ it is.” Roughpeak said hurriedly, “Let’s go! Let’s not chat here; let’s take a look at what’s up ahead! Let’s see if there are any other Empyrean Gods on this island. The further along we go, the stronger any surviving Empyrean Gods must be. Even if they aren’t able to make it to the next island, they should be able to stay alive for quite some time.”

“Yes, let’s take a look.” Ning nodded.

Ning and Roughpeak walked through the volcanic island, taking in the sights. A short while later, they found a winding series of spiky palaces.

“Over there. If there are any surviving Empyrean Gods, they should be living there.” Roughpeak hurriedly pointed towards the palaces.

As soon as his words came out...whoosh! A fur-clad, muscular, bronze-eyed man appeared at the entrance to one of the palaces, glancing outside. He instantly saw both Ning and Roughpeak.

“Eldest brother! Second brother! Third brother! Fourth brother! Fifth brother! Seventh sister!” The muscular man instantly called out in a loud voice.

Swish! Swish! Swish! One figure after another began to charge out from the other palaces. They all congregated together, staring towards the two newcomers.

Six were men, one was a woman. All of them were dressed in furs.

“Is that my young friend Roughpeak?” Suddenly, a wrinkle-faced man called out to the two.

“Seven Dragon Gods...all of you are still alive?” Roughpeak began to roar in laughter.

“The Seven Dragon Gods of the Primordial Era?” Ning was truly shocked as well.

Before coming to this place, he had naturally read up on the Empyrean Gods who had entered Undermoon Lake. The Seven Dragon Gods had entered Undermoon Lake during the Primordial Era! Countless years had passed since then, and during his conversation with Roughpeak, Ning had learned that the island of snow had suffered attacks every thousand years. The same was most likely true for the other islands as well.

To be able to live for even a hundred million years in Undermoon Lake was a marvel. To be able to survive from the Primordial Era to the modern day?!

“Young friend Roughpeak, why have you come to this damned hellhole? We should never have come to this damned place.” The oldest-looking man spoke out as Ning and Roughpeak walked towards the seven.

“Too late for regrets. I’m already here.” Roughpeak let out a sigh. “I was trapped on the snowy island for more than a hundred million years, but the seven of you entered during the Primordial Era. I’m in complete awe of you; you were actually able to survive for so long!”

“Ahahaha...and who is this new friend?” A fiery-haired man looked towards Ning, a friendly look in his eyes. “Although I don’t recognize him, I can sense that he’s one of my brothers, a human.”

“Let me make the introductions.”

Roughpeak smiled as he looked towards Ning. “Junior apprentice-brother Darknorth, I trust that you must have guessed by now, but these seven are the Seven Dragon Gods who once followed Human Sovereign Suiren in his campaigns across the world. In the past, as our human race just began its rise to prominence, we were still testing out many different cultivation paths. Human Sovereign Suiren once harvested draconic blood from a True God and used it to qualitatively change a human’s body and allow them to train in superior Fiendgod techniques. However, he discovered later that this sort of forced transformation had an impact on both the body and the soul, resulting in most being unable to progress past the Empyrean God level.”

“Why do you have to talk about these things?”

“At least we became Empyrean Gods!”

The Seven Dragon Gods all laughed.

“These are the Seven Dragon Gods. The eldest is Empyrean God Witherdragon. This is the second, Empyrean God Fiercedragon. This is the third, Empyrean God Blackdragon. This is the fourth, Empyrean God Dragoncaller. This is the fifth, Empyrean God Owldragon. This is the sixth, Empyrean God Tyranodragon. And this one, the most beautiful of the seven, would naturally be Empyrean God Voidragon.” Smiling, Roughpeak made the introductions.

As for Ning, he felt true admiration for these seven.

Ning had always felt true admiration for the earliest human experts. They had established a foundation for all their human descendants, and they had even used their own bodies to test out new cultivation methods. It wasn't just these seven who had attempted to use draconic blood to transform their bodies; many others had died on the spot, their bodies instantly blasting apart.

Not just anyone could withstand the blood of a draconic True God, after all. The seven of them were seven of Suiren's early test subjects, and they became known as the Seven Dragon Gods. Although they weren't true siblings, they were even closer to each other than true siblings!

"Hurry up and introduce this young friend of yours." The only woman present was dressed in fur clothes that couldn't disguise her beauty. Her voice was clear and crisp, but as heroic and valiant as any of the others.

"He is junior apprentice-brother Darknorth, one of the disciples under the tutelage of Daofather Subhuti," Roughpeak said with a sigh.

"Darknorth?"

"My young friend Darknorth, it's been a long time since we've encountered other humans. The seven of us have nearly died of loneliness here. Ahahaha...come, come, come! Taste some of this wine which our seventh sister created through harvesting elemental energy." The tall, muscular, bronze-eyed man who had been the first to see Ning and Roughpeak immediately stepped forward, slapping his arm around Ning's shoulders and pulling him towards his palace.

The Seven Dragon Gods of the Primordial Era, Empyrean God Roughpeak, and Ji Ning. These nine humans all seated themselves in a casual manner, beginning to drink wine in large gulps while chatting.

"I trust that the seven of you know by now that the outside world is now in the era of the Three Realms," Roughpeak suddenly said.

"Yes, we've heard of this."

"Some Empyrean Gods who passed by mentioned this to us." They all

nodded.

Roughpeak nodded as well. “But I imagine that those Empyrean Gods didn’t know that the Three Realms have fallen into a state of crisis. A tribulation has descended.”

“Tribulation?” The faces of the Seven Dragon Gods all changed.

“One which is as deadly as the tribulation which destroyed the Primordial Era,” Roughpeak said somberly.

“What?!”

The Seven Dragon Gods had entered Undermoon Lake during the Primordial Era, and so they didn’t experience the war that destroyed it. However, the Empyrean Gods that had come past them since then had described the war to them. They knew exactly how calamitous that war had been. Even major powers had died, as well as Elder Gods! The Pangu Chaosworld itself had been shattered!

“It was junior apprentice-brother Darknorth who told me this.” Roughpeak looked towards Ning.

“Let me explain.” Ning began to narrate the details of this tribulation to the seven. Upon hearing the story, their faces all changed.

“If I knew this...I would’ve slaughtered all of the Empyrean Gods of the Seamless Gate that came here in the past!” Empyrean God Tyranodragon bellowed.

“Damn. Damn! They really are like a pack of wild mongrels that just can’t be tamed. They should die. Every last one of them should die!”

The Seven Dragon Gods were all utterly furious. They could imagine how disastrous and calamitous this new storm would be. The more they imagined it, the angrier they grew.

Chapter 14: The Predicament

After chatting for a long period of time and finishing all the wine, everyone prepared to retire to their own residences. Ji Ning hurriedly advised Emphyrean God Roughpeak, "Senior apprentice-brother Roughpeak, there's a stone stele located right at the entrance to Volcano Island. The stone stele contains the representation of Snowfiend displaying the intricacies of his staff-technique in detail. You can go take a look."

"Oh?" Roughpeak's eyes lit up.

"Roughpeak, you haven't taken a look yet?"

"Hurry up and take a look. That stone stele really is quite interesting."

"Yes, hurry up and take a look!"

The Dragon Gods all laughed and urged him to go take a look.

"Fine. I'll go take a look right now." Roughpeak immediately headed out towards the stone stele by himself.

"My friend Darknorth, there are plenty of palaces here. Just pick one as you see fit. Since you've just arrived, it's guaranteed that you won't suffer any attacks for the next thousand years," Emphyrean God Witherdragon said.

"Alright." Ning nodded, then casually chose a palace to temporarily reside in.

Two days later.

Roughpeak returned from his trip to the stone stele, once more reuniting with the Seven Dragon Gods.

"How did it go? That stone stele is quite nice, right?" Emphyrean God Owldragon laughed.

"It really is quite something, but my path isn't the Dao of Taiji. Alas...I was trapped on the snowy island for more than a hundred million years because my attacks are too weak." Roughpeak let out a sigh. "My agility

techniques ensured that not even Snowfiend could kill me, but what of it? My attacks are too weak; Snowfiend completely refused to acknowledge me. He wouldn't let me pass him no matter what! It was all thanks to junior apprentice-brother Darknorth."

"And where is our friend Darknorth?" Witherdragon asked.

"He's still training," Voiddragon replied. "I saw him meditating so I didn't disturb him."

"Darknorth truly is hard-working." Blackdragon asked, "Roughpeak, how strong is our friend Darknorth? The seven of us have been trapped here for far, far too long. We've been here since the Primordial Era and really can't take it any longer. If Darknorth is strong enough, we'd be willing to ask him to help lead us out of here. We no longer harbor any false illusions regarding the treasures of Undermoon Lake."

"How strong is he?" Roughpeak shook his head. "I've seen him fight. He's skilled in swordplay and quite formidable, but he's only reached the third stage of swordforce. His divine abilities should be quite powerful, though. He spent several days travelling from the snowy island to Volcano Island. I imagine that he must've fought against Snowfiend for a long period of time, resulting in Snowfiend acknowledging his power and letting him pass."

"Third-stage swordforce?" Witherdragon shook his head. "A pity. Although he can be considered an expert of the Dao of the Sword, it won't be enough against the Purgatory God."

"A pity."

"Well, let's keep waiting."

All of them were rather disappointed.

"I'm already satisfied at having been able to make it out of the first island to Volcano Island. In truth, my decision to follow junior apprentice-brother Darknorth was a gamble. When I saw him fight, I didn't have much faith in him...but in the end, my gamble paid off. Honestly, there's no need to be depressed; perhaps after million years or so, junior

apprentice-brother Darknorth will suddenly advance in strength and we'll be able to make yet another gamble," Roughpeak said.

"Hopefully." The Seven Dragon Gods all sighed.

They had been hoping that someone would be able to come here and help them out, but Roughpeak had actually been carried here by Ning; there was no hope to be found from him at all. As for Ning himself...he had been just barely able to make it into Volcano Island. The chance that he would be able to progress further was quite remote.

.....

Within a quiet, secluded palace. Ning was seated in the lotus position here, completely silent. His other clone was within his Immortal estate, and both of them were meditating on the [Five Treasures].

His earlier breakthrough had allowed him to completely master the third chapter of the [Five Treasures], and so he was now able to begin training in the final, fourth chapter of the [Five Treasures]. This final chapter caused Ning to feel even more amazed and how unfathomably marvelous the [Five Treasures] sword-art was.

Ning knew very well that Undermoon Lake would not be an easy place to conquer. He had only been able to reach Volcano Island; how incredibly difficult would the next few islands be? Thus, he had to do everything he could to grow stronger.

Time slowly flowed on.

In the blink of an eye, more than half a year had gone past. During this past half-year, Ning's two clones finished nearly half of the fourth chapter of the [Five Treasures] sword-art. Now, however, they found it difficult to advance any further whatsoever. Thus, Ning decided to completely halt his meditations on it and turn his attention towards perfecting his [Brightmoon] sword-art. He had yet to improve the [Brightmoon] sword-art after reaching the fourth stage of swordforce.

Perfecting [Brightmoon] was, by comparison, an easier task than mastering the fourth chapter of the [Five Treasures]. In fact, over the

course of perfecting it, Ning occasionally gained insights that allowed him to once more ruminate on the fourth chapter.

After one year and three months had passed since Ning's arrival at Volcano Island...Ning finally opened his eyes.

"My [Brightmoon] sword-art has reached the apex of perfection possible for me at present." Ning rose to his feet, a smile on his face. "If I was to meet Snowfiend again, I'd probably be able to easily defeat him with just a single body."

Swordforce was highly well-suited for combat to begin with.

Ning's [Brightmoon] sword-art had been based off of the essence of the [Five Treasures] sword-art, a technique which surpassed the limits set by the Heavenly Daos. Its power was naturally staggering, and in attack power it was now completely capable of suppressing Snowfiend. Once Ning used [Three Heads, Six Arms] and fought against Snowfiend's two arms with six arms...he would absolutely be able to dominate and defeat Snowfiend.

"It's been quite some time since I've spoken to Roughpeak and the Seven Dragon Gods." Ning felt rather embarrassed. During this year, he had spent all of his time in meditating. He immediately left his palace to go meet with the Seven Dragon Gods.

A short while later, the Seven Dragon Gods, Roughpeak, and Ning all gathered together once more.

"It's very unlikely that the eight of us will be able to advance any further, and so we often gather together. But you, junior apprentice-brother Darknorth...you end up going into seclusion for a full year in one training session! You remind of me myself when I first entered Undermoon Lake," Roughpeak said with a laugh.

"I'm embarrassed," Ning said.

"Oh, right." Ning looked at the other eight. "I'm preparing to go test the next guardian and see if I can reach the next island?"

"You?"

The Seven Dragon Gods and Roughpeak all glanced at each other.

Witherdragon said, "Brother Darknorth, do you know that there are treasures on the third island? If you can make it there, you can acquire treasures."

"Treasures?" Ning's eyes lit up.

"The sea yaksha, Snowfiend, and Purgatory God - these are three of the guardians which the creator of Undermoon Lake left behind. If you can make it past the three of them, you'll be able to acquire treasures. And of course, the fourth and fifth islands all have treasures as well."

Witherdragon looked at Ning. "But...do you think those treasures are so easily acquired? You can probably guess at how powerful the Purgatory God is."

Ning immediately began to listen carefully. Only by understanding both one's self and one's enemies would one be able to win all battles.

"On the other side of Volcano Island, you'll be able to see yet another floating wooden bridge. This floating wooden bridge will pass through an endless sea of fire...and within the sea of fire lives a Fiendgod known as the Purgatory God." Witherdragon continued, "The Purgatory God is formed by countless flames that gather together. He wields a pair of halberds, and he is incredibly powerful, close to a True God in might. Although he flies quite slowly, his twin halberds attack at an utterly incredible speed. His infiniforce has even reached the fourth stage! Compared to Snowfiend, he's stronger, has faster attacks, and is even more skilled. When those twin halberds of his start to chop about...he's an utter nightmare."

Ning was secretly shocked by what he heard. Even stronger and even faster than Snowfiend? This meant that this Purgatory God's underlying foundation was superior to Snowfiend's!

"The seven of us know exactly how powerful he is. Honestly, we hope for your success, as that way we'd be able to follow you through, but..." Witherdragon shook his head. "He's far too powerful. If you aren't strong enough, you will likely die."

“The seven of you entered long ago during the Primordial Era.” Puzzled, Ning said, “If you wanted to follow a powerful Empyrean God to the next island, you probably could’ve done so long ago. You should’ve run into quite a few by now.”

“Right.” Voidragon, the only female of the seven, nodded. She said in a clear voice, “Your words are correct. From the Primordial Era to the present day, we’ve encountered more than ten who we were absolutely certain had the power to pass through. However, all of them came a long, long time ago. When the seven of us work together, even when the Purgatory God attacks the island he is unable to do anything to us. We were patient enough to keep waiting and training, hoping that we’d be able to break through by relying on our own power.”

“However...roughly thirty million years ago, the Purgatory God told us that we have almost spent an entire chaos cycle in Undermoon Lake. After a hundred million years, he would use his full power to wipe us all out.” Voidragon’s gaze turned dim. “Only then did we realize that there was a limit to the amount of time which Undermoon Lake gave us.”

“If the Purgatory God really was to attack at full-power and press us nonstop...our divine power would rapidly deplete, and when we use it all up, we’ll die. We’ve never heard of the term ‘chaos cycle’ before, but we understand that it has to be a period of time which the major power that created this world uses.”

“A chaos cycle?” Ning was startled. A chaos cycle had already passed since the Primordial Era?

Ning had felt all along that Undermoon Lake was a place that was meant to cultivate Empyrean Gods through particularly ruthless methods. However, a chaos cycle was enough; if one wasn’t able to make any real breakthroughs in an entire chaos cycle, they generally wouldn’t be able to make any more breakthroughs at all.

“We only have seventy million years left.” Tyranodragon’s deep, sonorous voice boomed out. “We absolutely aren’t willing to just admit defeat. We want to keep living, so our only hope right now is to find a

powerful Empyrean God who can bring us along with him. But alas, no such figure has appeared recently.”

Ning nodded. During the past ten million years, he had been the only person to even enter.

“Although we truly wish to leave this place and aren’t willing to just die here...Ji Ning, you really are not yet strong enough.” Tyranodragon continued, “Please don’t blame me for saying something unpleasant, but the Purgatory God truly is incredibly powerful. Your third-stage swordforce...it’s far from being enough. You don’t have much of a chance to make it past him. To make it past him, you generally have to reach the fourth stage of thunderforce, taiji-force, infiniforce, heartforce, etc.; you have to reach the fourth stage to have any hope of succeeding.”

“And of course, if you are particularly skilled in a battle-type force, such as swordforce or saberforce, you’ll be completely capable of succeeding.”

Tyranodragon looked at Ning. “Brother Darknorth, you should wait until you have at least a decent chance before making the attempt. Otherwise... you’ll be gambling with your life. If you are lucky, you might escape, but if you aren’t, you’ll die there.”

“Junior apprentice-brother Darknorth, it’s best if you wait patiently for some time. You aren’t like us; a long path still lies ahead of you,” Roughpeak said. “Honestly, I’m already quite content with being able to see Volcano Island.”

Ning was speechless.

Third-stage swordforce?

Why did they believe him to be at the third stage of swordforce?

Chapter 15: Iceheart Pith

“Stop!” Ji Ning hurriedly called out.

The Seven Dragon Gods and Empyrean God Roughpeak paused their protestations, looking at Ning. Truthfully speaking, they didn’t really want to say these words either, but they also didn’t wish to see Ning die in the hands of the Purgatory God.

“You, uh...who told you that my swordforce is at the third stage?” Ning laughed.

“Eh?” The other eight were all startled. Judging from Ji Ning’s words...it seemed as though he wasn’t at that stage?

“I did.” Roughpeak looked at Ning, puzzled. “Was my guess wrong?”

“Oh!” Ning now understood. Laughing, he explained, “When I first encountered you, senior apprentice-brother Roughpeak, I was indeed just at the third stage of swordforce.”

These words instantly caused the eight to reveal looks of surprised delight.

“You broke through?”

“You made a breakthrough when fighting Snowfiend?”

“Have you reached the fourth stage of swordforce?” All of them looked eagerly and excitedly towards Ning.

Ning smiled, then nodded. At the same time, he waved a finger, causing a loop of extremely sharp black sword-light to circle around it.

Upon seeing the black, sword-shaped swordforce, the Seven Dragon Gods and Roughpeak felt extremely excited, but they also didn’t know whether to laugh or to cry.

Roughpeak finally said, “Junior apprentice-brother Darknorth, I...uh...”

“I understand,” Ning said hurriedly. “Senior apprentice-brother Roughpeak, you believed that I had fought against Snowfiend for an extremely long period of time, and so you naturally came to certain

conclusions based on that. It's my fault for not having explained it to you."

"How can it be your fault? Who would be so foolish as to blurt out exactly how strong they are?" The nearby Empyrean God Tyranodragon boomed with laughter. "Excellent. It seems as though the seven of us aren't destined to die just yet. Given how powerful you are, brother Darknorth, it should be easy for you to overcome the Purgatory God. Come, come, come! Let's make haste towards the next island. Our chances of leaving will be greater as well."

"We've been in Undermoon Lake for countless years. Oh - according to what the Purgatory God said, we've been here for nearly a 'chaos cycle'. I wonder what the next island is like?"

"I'm rather curious."

"I hear that after defeating the Purgatory God, you'll be able to acquire treasures."

"Fourth brother, why are YOU getting excited? You won't be the one to get the treasures!"

"My excitement is no business of yours!"

They all celebrated and joked about. Clearly, the chance to leave this Volcano Island had put them all in quite a good mood.

An hour later, Ning and the others arrived at the other end of Volcano Island.

"Here we are. All you need to do is advance past the floating wooden bridge." Witherdragon pointed towards the wooden bridge up ahead. In front of them was an endless sea of flames that stretched off into the horizon, with the wooden bridge being the only thing within it.

"It's really hot." Ning turned his head and grinned. "Everyone, come into my Immortal estate for a few days."

"After you."

"Sorry for the trouble."

“C’mere, lemme see what your Immortal estate is like!” They all laughed and jested. Their relaxation was primarily due to the fact that they knew how strong Ning was and that he was certain of victory. Roughpeak, when he had first joined Ning, had done so in a much more nervous, restless manner.

Ning waved his hand. None of the eight Empyrean Gods resisted, allowing him to draw them into his Immortal estate.

“Let’s go.” Ning seated himself within his Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle, then began to rapidly advance via the wooden bridge into the sea of flames. Although the flames were incredibly hot, Empyrean Gods would generally find it easily to endure them, to say nothing of someone like Ning who was protected by the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art].

After flyinig for just a single hour...

“Eh?” Ning came to a sudden halt, staring in front of himself. Up ahead, a massive red figure that was more than ten meters tall had appeared on the bridge. The figure was bald, had red eyebrows, a red beard, and was extremely muscular. He wielded a pair of short halberds in his hands, and his dark-red eyes were fixed upon Ning.

“The invisible pressure he gives off truly is stronger than Snowfiend’s,” Ning murmured to himself. The only reason Ning was able to sense this was because his foe had prepared his full power, not disguising his aura at all.

Ning put away the Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle, then landed on the bridge. A pair of swords appeared in his hands.

He wasn’t even willing to use [Three Heads, Six Arms]. Now that his swordforce had reached a new level, and his [Brightmoon] sword-art had been further perfected...he wanted to give himself a good challenge.

“I can sense...that the volcanic island no longer has any Empyrean Gods on it.” The Purgatory God’s dark-red eyes held a hint of madness within them. “It seems you are quite confident.”

“Please come,” Ning said politely.

“Alright.”

The Purgatory God didn't hesitate. He immediately bound forward, his body moving at incredible speed. He instantly arrived before Ning, who charged forward as well, sending two streaks of black sword-light towards the Purgatory God.

Boom! Boom!

Ning couldn't help but take several steps back, while the Purgatory God was knocked back by one step as well.

“What tremendous power.” Ning was secretly surprised. “In strength alone, he's nearly at the True God level. Fortunately, my swordforce reached the fourth level.” After swordforce reached the fourth level, Ning was able to unleash power equivalent to 80% of a full-force heartforce blow with each ordinary strike. This level of power was absolutely enough for him to do battle head-on against his foe. All Ning had to do was reserve enough divine power to allow him to move about at high speed. There wasn't even a need for him to use the [Starseizing Hand] or [Three Heads, Six Arms]. In fact, he didn't even really need to fight with full power.

Ning was completely capable of replenishing the amount of divine power which he was using up through absorbing natural elemental energy from Heaven and Earth.

“Stage-four swordforce?” The Purgatory God instantly grew even frenzied.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! The twin halberds hacked downwards, screaming through the air like devils.

The two short halberds were like the Taiji itself; one was Yin while the other was Yang, and both joined together into a perfect whole that completely embodied the essence of what Wuji, Infinity, was all about. Although Ning also wielded a pair of twin swords, in terms of making his swords work together in harmony he was vastly inferior to the Purgatory God. Anyone who had embarked on the path of Wuji would be extremely skilled in making multiple weapons work together.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Ning's sword-light remained as fast and bizarre as ever.

In Undermoon Lake, Ning had spent most of his time and effort on the Shadowless stance, and this stance was the most unpredictable stance of them all.

The two exchanged blows for a long while. For a period of time, Ning was at a slight disadvantage; although his attacks were more powerful, his two weapons didn't work together as seamlessly as his enemy's did, resulting in him being at an overall disadvantage. In truth, if Ning used the [Three Heads, Six Arms] technique, he would be able to quickly suppress his opponent, but Ning was in no hurry to do so. Finding such a perfect opponent wasn't an easy task!

The power of his sword-arts primarily came from his black swordforce. Very little of Ning's divine power was being used up, and it was actually being replenished faster than it was being consumed. He'd easily be able to battle like this for a thousand years without any problems.

This battle went on for more than half a month. Ning had just broken through to the fourth stage of swordforce a short while ago; now that he was able to fight against such a perfectly matched foe for so long, his sword-arts grew increasingly refined and perfected. Although he had spent more than a year meditating on his sword-arts on Volcano Island, he hadn't had an actual opponent to test himself against. Only upon encountering a formidable opponent would he realize that his 'perfected' sword-arts were still lacking in many areas. As a result of his continued improvement, his sword-arts grew increasingly powerful.

"You win." The Purgatory God suddenly retreated.

Ning laughed. During the past half-month, he had went from being at a slight disadvantage to holding a slight advantage! The Dao of the Sword was simply too well-suited for launching offensive attacks.

The Purgatory God looked at Ning, his lips cracking apart into an ugly grin. "I'll be waiting for you at Myriad Mountains Island." His body then vanished, leaving behind countless flames that quickly dissipated.

“Myriad Mountains Island?” Ning murmured softly to himself, “Can it be that the third island is Myriad Mountains Island?”

Swish. Ning boarded his Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle, then continued to advance.

After flying for around an hour, an enormous, gourd-shaped island appeared before him. This gourd-shaped island looked as though it was a small island and a large island joined together.

As for the wooden bridge, it led to the small island. At the end of the wooden bridge stood the bald, red-browed Purgatory God.

“So this is Myriad Mountains Island?” Ning landed with a laugh.

“To be precise, the small island is a treasure island.” The Purgatory God pointed towards the distant, larger island. “That large island over there is the actual Myriad Mountains Island. As for this small island...it has quite a few treasures. You can choose three of them. After doing so, you have to enter the large island. You won’t be allowed to come here again.”

Undermoon Lake was a place where you could only advance, not retreat. Ning understood this.

Upon reaching Volcano Island, for example, there would be no way back to the snowy island.

After entering Myriad Mountains Island, there would be no way back to Volcano Island. The only options were to die or to successfully pass through the remaining islands and return to the Three Realms.

“Three?” Ning said with surprise, “I hear that the fourth and fifth islands all have treasures as well.”

“Yes.” The Purgatory God nodded. “The third, fourth, and fifth islands all have treasures within them. In each place, you can choose three items. Thus, there’s a total of nine items you can acquire. Once you reach the fifth island, you’ll be allowed to leave Undermoon Lake. But of course, in this chaos cycle, the only one who survived was the man called ‘Jueming’.”

Ning instantly became filled with questions. The legends of the Three Realms stated that Buddha Jueming left Undermoon Lake with three treasures...but the Purgatory God now said that he left with nine?

“It seems there are six treasures which Buddha Jueming did not make public,” Ning mused to himself.

“Follow me.”

They walked through the smaller island, nearly a million kilometers in circumference. It took them only a short while to travel hundreds of thousands of kilometers and arrive at a lake. Compared to the endless amount of distance the Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle had traversed over the oceans here, this island really was just a small island.

The island lake was covered by a hazy mist that prevented others from seeing it clearly.

“Disperse.” The Purgatory God waved his hand, causing all the mist to dissipate and the lake to appear. The lake was actually separated into nine distinct regions! One region was filled with incredibly hot Ninefire Lava, with a dark-red snow lotus growing atop it. Another region was filled with slowly flowing rivers of icy Iceheart Pith, and atop the pith grew a clump of jewel-like Iceheart Leaf. There was also a region filled with many types of precious medicinal herbs, all filled with life energy. These precious herbs had given birth to a jade-green fruit that appeared to levitate above them...

Nine regions of fire, of ice, of darkness, of life, of death...

A single invisible formation joined these nine regions together in a perfect manner.

“Eh? Iceheart Pith? Ninefire Lava? This place actually has both of them?” Ning’s heartrate instantly sped up. He grew excited now; he didn’t expect that he would discover Iceheart Pith, which he badly desired, right here within the third island.

“The treasures which Buddha Jueming made public are actually all here.” Ning instantly guessed at the reason behind this. “It seems that

Buddha Jueming didn't make public any of the treasures he acquired on the fourth and fifth islands." Anyone could tell that the treasures on the later islands would be even more valuable and useful.

"Choose." The Purgatory God, upon seeing Ning go into a daze, urged Ning to hurry up. "There are nine types of treasures here. You can choose three of them."

"Nine types of treasure?" Ning was startled. There were nine regions in total. The Iceheart Pith region had a single Iceheart Leaf growing atop it. Although Iceheart Leaf was valuable, the large amount of flowing Iceheart Pith was something which Ning desperately desired as well.

"Can I choose the Iceheart Pith?" Ning suddenly asked.

"Iceheart Pith?" The Purgatory God frowned as he looked at Ning. "Iceheart Leafs crystallize above the Iceheart Pith. You should choose the leaf; the leaf is the crystallized essence of the pith. All nine regions have crystallized essences of certain things; you should choose them."

"But I want the Iceheart Pith. Can I have it?" Ning asked. He definitely had to choose the Iceheart Leaf, but what of the Iceheart Pith?

The Purgatory God frowned. "The Iceheart Pith is the foundation; because it exists, Iceheart Leaf can grow. After an Iceheart Leaf is harvested, more will grow after a long period of time. You can choose Iceheart Leaf, but the underlying Iceheart Pith...how could I possibly give it to you?"

Chapter 16: Icefire Formation

Ji Ning instantly felt his heart clench. Iceheart Pith was the foundation of the leaf?

“With the pith gone, there will be no more leaves in the future.” The Purgatory God looked at Ning. “Many other Empyrean Gods will enter the Myriad Mountains Island. I can’t just let one of the treasures disappear due to you.”

“But I heard that the person who left, Jueming, was given more than just a single Iceheart Leaf,” Ning suddenly said.

“Uh...”

The Purgatory God’s face changed slightly. He cursed softly, “Damn that Jueming. Why did he have to blabber about the treasures?”

“Yes, your words are correct.” The Purgatory God looked towards Ning. “Jueming entered Undermoon Lake long, long ago. He was able to make it all the way to Myriad Mountains Island in one try, and was only the second person to make it here. Back then, there were many Iceheart Leafs, and so giving him twelve didn’t make much of a difference. But as time flowed on, the Empyrean Gods who entered this place were all tempered and strengthened. More of them entered Myriad Mountains Island...and as a result, the amount of treasures stored here began to run low. That’s why the reward was changed to be a single leaf.”

“Since you also made it all the way here on your first try...if you want twelve leaves, I’ll give them to you.”

The Purgatory God waved his hand. Whoosh. Instantly, the Iceheart Pith region began to ripple, as though some sort of restrictive spell had just been dissipated. One platter after another began to appear, each holding an Iceheart Leaf. There had to be at least ten thousand of the leaves within the great Iceheart Pith region.

“That many?” Ning was shocked.

“Is it? If every single Empyrean God takes away twelve leaves, then a

thousand of them would take over more than ten thousand, yes?" The Purgatory God snorted. "I have to be sparing with these treasures. The only reason why I'm willing to offer you twelve is because you made it here on your first trip without failure. Twelve of the leaves wouldn't be a problem, but the Iceheart Pith...that's the foundation. Forget about it."

Ning understood. These Iceheart Leaves all came from the Iceheart Pith before him; to acquire the pith was highly unlikely.

"Actually..." Ning suddenly said, "I only need a small amount of Iceheart Pith. Let's say...a few dozen square meters of it?"

"A few dozen square meters?" The Purgatory God stared. "You call that a 'small amount'?"

Ning felt a surge of delight in his heart. Judging from the Purgatory God's attitude, there was clearly some bargaining room here.

"There are several square kilometers of Iceheart Pith here. A few dozen square meters is nothing," Ning said hurriedly. Seeing the look on the Purgatory God's face, Ning knew that he was rather unlikely to agree. Ning immediately said, "Just thirty square meters!"

"Do you know how deep the Iceheart Pith goes?" The Purgatory God explained, "They are nearly ninety meters deep. You want nearly 2700 cubic meters of it? Completely impossible."

"Just nine meters deep and nine meters long," Ning said hurriedly. "That's all I want..."

The Purgatory God frowned.

"Just a tiny bit of Iceheart Pith and a single Iceheart Leaf." Ning looked at the Purgatory God. "I won't take any of the other treasures. Earlier, you said that I can take three of my choosing. All I want is a bit of Iceheart Pith and a single Iceheart Leaf."

"Nine meters..." The Purgatory God looked at Ning, hesitating.

Ning looked back at him.

"Fine." The Purgatory God nodded. "Since you made it all the way here

on your first try...and since nine meters won't have an impact on the foundation as a whole. Earlier, I told you that you can choose three treasures; now, you'll only be allowed to pick a single Iceheart Leaf and some of the Iceheart Pith."

Ning was overjoyed.

"Do you have any treasures to hold it?" The Purgatory God looked at Ning. Ning quickly took out a green-jade bottle. The Purgatory God nodded, then waved his hand. An invisible hand seemed to scrape out a small 'crater' in the Iceheart Pith, carving out a spherical portion that was nine meters long and nine meters deep. The Iceheart Pith floated straight towards Ning.

"Come here." Ning willed it, and the Iceheart Pith instantly flew into the green-jade bottle. He plugged it with a stopper, then waved his hand and collected the Iceheart Pith flying towards him as well. Only then did Ning let out a sigh of relief.

He had finally succeeded. In truth, the other treasures here were of little interest to Ning. He was neither an artifact forger, nor was he a pill refiner, and he had no other skills that could make use of these things.

What he needed were treasures and techniques that would increase his own strength.

The Purgatory God muttered to himself, "I really got ripped off this time. I'm usually able to shoo away Empyrean Gods just by giving them three Iceheart Leafs or equivalent treasures, but I ran into yet another person who knew that Jueming acquired twelve. Jueming...what a troublemaker."

"Shoo, shoo! Off with you!" The Purgatory God stared at Ning. "Are you waiting for me to show you off?"

Ning laughed, then immediately left.

Within the Immortal estate he was carrying. The second Ji Ning was within a meditative room inside the estate.

"I've acquired the Iceheart Pith." Ning held the green-jade bottle in his

hands, a look of delight on his face. “Fortunately, the Purgatory God was rather easygoing and easy to negotiate with. He wasn’t too stubborn. Otherwise, things would be quite troublesome.”

In truth, as soon as Ning saw that the Purgatory God had only been willing to give him a single Iceheart Leaf when Buddha Jueming had acquired twelve, Ning had immediately sensed that the Purgatory God was tampering with things a bit. This was because there was definitely no way that all of the other Empyrean Gods had merely received just a single leaf when they entered Myriad Mountains Island. The Purgatory God definitely had a certain amount of discretionary power.

Perhaps he wouldn’t be allowed to give an Empyrean God too much, but he could definitely choose to give them a bit less if he chose. And so, Ning decided to give negotiation a try...and he succeeded.

“Nine meters long, nine meters deep. Iceheart Pith is a bit lighter than I expected,” Ning mused to himself. “This amount of Iceheart Pith weighs roughly 300,000 kilograms or so.”

Iceheart Pith could float atop water. However, this amount sufficed for his needs.

“My thirty-six clones need a total of 180,000 kilograms. This is enough.”

After acquiring the necessary treasures, Ning no longer hesitated. He immediately took out a different, red-jade bottle. The red-jade bottle contained Ninefire Lava within it. Ning had prepared 50,000 kilograms of it for his journey to Undermoon Lake.

“Time to begin.”

Ning pulled open the stopper to the green-jade bottle and the red-jade bottle. He placed them atop the floor, then sat down in the lotus position.

Whoosh. Ning floated up into the air by roughly thirty meters, then the True Immortal energy within his body began to activate. Slowly, a formation-diagram created from an enormous amount of energy began to form below Ning. As the energy surged, the diagram began to shine with

golden light. The formation of golden light formed a sphere of nearly three hundred meters that was like an enormous screen.

A large amount of runes flowed atop it as Ning's energy flowed through it in an incomparably marvelous manner.

After a full hour, Ning finally finished manifesting the formation.

"The fire formation has finally manifested." Ning let out a sigh of relief. He took out a Great Firmament pill to replenish his energy, then once more began to manifest a second formation. In the air above Ning's head, a second formation of similar size began to slowly manifest. As Ning continued to materialize it, the formation slowly began to glow with black light. The formation continued to improve in power, until it became like black jade in appearance.

Three hundred meters of golden light below him.

Three hundred meters of black light above him.

"Now that the Icefire Formation has formed...it is time to refine the Jindan." Ning opened his eyes and stared towards the two distant bottles. The red-jade bottle and the green-jade bottle began to release the Ninefire Lava and the Iceheart Pith within them.

A total of 7,500 kilograms flew out from each. Ning was worried that he would run out, and so he brought out a bit more than he needed.

The streams of Ninefire Lava and the Iceheart Pith transformed into two spheres that hovered before Ning. One was a sphere of Ninefire Lava, while the other was a sphere of Iceheart Pith. Within the two spheres, Ninefire Lava and Iceheart Pith slowly bubbled and frothed.

Whooooosh. The essence within the Ninefire Lava sphere began to automatically and slowly be drawn downwards, being absorbed into the golden light diagram. As for the sphere of Iceheart Pith, its essence was similarly being drawn up into the black light diagram above Ning.

After absorbing the essence of these two treasures, both diagrams dramatically increased in power. They now contained an unfathomable, mysterious power that began to flow into Ning's body, mingling within

the Pure Yang Jindan inside of Ning.

The two diametrically opposed types of energy, fire from Ninefire Lava and ice from Iceheart Pith, both came from treasures that were created by the primordial chaos. They held tremendous, marvelous power within them.

“What a comfortable feeling.”

Ning could sense that the Pure Yang Jindan within his body was being baptized and transformed by the unspeakably marvelous power of ice and fire. This was an extremely comfortable feeling, and the Jindan was slowly beginning to transform. Despite how slow the process was, Ning could clearly sense every single part of the change.

Despite being slow, after two or three days, the transformation would be quite shocking.

“According to the records I read of the Icefire Jindan Smelting method, it will take roughly a month to upgrade my Jindan to the second tier. This is a slow process of nourishing and transforming the Jindan that cannot be rushed.” Ning tamped down the eagerness and excitement he felt, allowing the two giant formations to slowly extract energy from the two types of items to smelt his Jindan.

He believed that a month from now, his Pure Yang Jindan would reach the second tier. He would be a half-step into the Daofather level of power. This was a qualitative transformation, a fundamental transformation. Once his Jindan transformed, the soul within the Jindan would also be empowered at a rapid pace.

“I’ll wait for a month.”

One clone trained in the Icefire Jindan Smelting method, while the other left the smaller island and reached the larger island; Myriad Mountains Island.

The entrance to Myriad Mountains Island also had a black stone stele before it. This one was covered with a diagram of flames.

“The stone stele in front of Volcano Island contained the staff-arts of

Snowfiend. I imagine that this stone stele contains the the halberd-arts of the Purgatory God.” Ning was still quite intrigued; although he had battled against the Purgatory God for a long period of time, that was a wild fight that made it difficult for him to truly understand the true essence and nature of his opponent’s techniques.

Ning stood before the black stone stele, staring at the flame diagram. Soon, his mind was drawn into it.

Within a blurry region, a human-shaped creature was brandishing two halberds. The creature started with elementary stances, but slowly began to advance through the many deeper variations on the twin halberds technique. It started simple and became complicated; started slow and became fast. In the end, it formed into the most terrifying stance which the Purgatory God had.

A long time later, Ning’s mind escaped the stone stele. He revealed a look of approval on his face. “I gained quite a bit from viewing the entire technique, from start to finish. My twin swords are still a bit inferior by comparison.” Ning had gained certain insights that would allow him to perfect the [Brightmoon] sword-art further.

“First, Myriad Mountains Island.” Ning swept it with his gaze.

This vast island was filled with mountains. Some pierced high into the clouds, some were as slender and sharp as knives, some were short, some were strange-looking. There were at least ten thousand mountains here, and none of the mountains were linked together. To see more than ten thousand solitary mountains...this truly was a strange sight.

“I wonder which Empyrean Gods are on this island.” Ning immediately walked towards the depths of the island.

Chapter 17: Relentless Until Dead

“According to what the Purgatory God said, this island is named ‘Myriad Mountains Island’.” Ji Ning smiled, the Seven Dragon Gods and Empyrean God Roughpeak by his side.

“Myriad Mountains Island? Not bad, not bad.” Empyrean God Tyranodragon stared with his large bronze eyes towards the surrounding area. “These mountains are like spears that are jabbing towards the heavens. Interesting, interesting. Myriad Mountains Island...a fine name!”

Roughpeak had returned to his normal, relaxed, graceful demeanor. Looking at his surroundings, he said with delight, “I didn’t expect that I’d be able to see the third island so soon. I had thought that I would be satisfied with just seeing the second island. Haha...perhaps, junior apprentice-brother Darknorth, you’ll be able to make it all the way out in one try.”

“He just might.”

“Brother Darknorth, we believe in you.”

They all chortled with laughter.

Ning, however, didn’t dare to make any boasts. The nine of them walked forward together. Although the island was quite large, they were able to advance through it at tremendous speed, thanks to spatial compression techniques they used. After walking for just a short while, they had already travelled millions of kilometers. They could vaguely make out the sound of laughter and jesting in the distance.

This caused Ning and the rest of the nine to exchange curious looks.

“It seems as though there are quite a few people here.”

“Let’s go take a look.”

They immediately headed towards the direction of the voices, and as they drew nearer the voices became clearer.

“Excellent, excellent! Big brother Feiyou, your song was excellent. Let

me sing as well!”

“Undermoon Lake, how truly carefree,
Drinking fine wine, how truly sublime,
No worries at all, no worries at all,
A nap I’ll take, and I’ll sleep till I wake!”

The coarse, rough voice boomed out like thunder, carrying a certain cadence and tempo to it. Upon hearing this, Ning couldn’t help but blink. This was ‘singing’? What a perfectly awful song!

Soon, Ning and the rest of the nine reached the region where the voices were coming from. They saw a bonfire blazing in the midst of a desolate, wild area, and skinned haunches of animal meat were currently being roasted above the bonfire. A large amount of glistening oil dripped down from the meat, falling into the flames and emitting crackling sounds. The fragrance of the meat had long ago wafted out to the nine.

Dozens of animals were being roasted in unison, and around the bonfire there were men and women who were either sitting or standing and singing. Most of them were dressed in furs, and they all looked quite relaxed and content. There were also some dressed in robes, but they looked similarly casual and relaxed. They were all either holding wine gourds or wine bottles in their arms as they gulped down wine and chomped away at their meat, laughing and shouting with abandon.

“Ahaha, you guys truly do have it sublime. You even have meat to eat!” Empyrean God Witherdragon laughed loudly and charged towards them.

“I knew that it had to be big brother Feiyou over there. All of you who followed big brother Feiyou have had meat to eat and wine to drink. I, on the other hand, have been starving!” Empyrean God Tyranodragon charged over as well.

All of the Seven Dragon Gods ran over, with Ning and Roughpeak following behind them.

“Why are there so many Empyrean Gods here?” Ning was secretly

shocked. He saw nearly a hundred Empyrean Gods present!

“The Seven Dragon Gods? You’ve all finally arrived!”

“The seven of you insisted on waiting at Volcano Island for so long, saying that you were going to rely on yourselves to make it here. What, have you finally succeeded?”

“Ahahaha, brother Witherdragon! Come, eat!”

The lively Empyrean Gods joyfully welcomed the seven. The Seven Dragon Gods had been on Volcano Island for a very long period of time, nearly an entire chaos cycle. Thus, all of the Empyrean Gods present knew the seven of them! More than half recognized Empyrean God Roughpeak as well. As for Ji Ning...none here knew him!

“Let me make the introductions,” Witherdragon said in a loud voice. “This is my good friend, Darknorth! I’m quite ashamed to say this, but we relied on brother Darknorth to make it here from Volcano Island. As soon as he entered Undermoon Lake, he charged straight through all impediments to make it to this location, battling through all three guardians.”

“Oh?”

“Come, brother Darknorth! Let me toast you!”

“You were able to battle your way to Myriad Mountains Island in one try? Admirable!” Instantly, the many Empyrean Gods all turned to look towards Ning. They all had a different look in their eyes, and each of them voluntarily offered Ning a toast.

Ning began to drink and chat with these Empyrean Gods. Slowly, he began to understand what was going on here. Aside from the nine of them who had just entered, there had been a total of ninety-eight Empyrean God present. However, the vast majority of them had followed other Empyrean Gods to this location. They had all given up their hopes of making it through Undermoon Lake on their own, which was why they had chosen to follow others.

Only nine of the ninety-eight had truly relied on their own power to

make it to this place.

These nine were 'Skyriver', 'Oddwitch', 'Cloudscar', 'Feiyou', 'Eastvoid', 'Seasonstep', 'Coppersong', 'Zhenbu', and 'Autumnwing'. These nine Empyrean Gods had all mastered the likes of taiji-force, infiniforce, thunderforce, sharpforce, and other forces to the fourth level. They were powerful enough to make it past the Purgatory God, which was why quite a few Empyrean Gods were willing to follow them.

"This is my old friend Feiyou." Witherdragon led Ning over to meet with Feiyou.

"Brother Darknorth, you truly are formidable. You actually made it here on your very first try. This is incredibly rare! Even I had to spend tens of thousands of years on Volcano Island before I made a breakthrough that allowed me to reach this place," Feiyou said with a laugh.

"Brother Darknorth," Witherdragon said with a laugh, "This old friend of mine, Feiyou, can't live without meat or wine. Thus, he always carries an estate-world treasure with him that he fills up with many wild beasts to feast upon. Wine can be distilled from the natural energy of Heaven and Earth, but meat can only come from rearing livestock. Thus, the Empyrean Gods around my old friend Feiyou will always have quite the comfortable life. Just look at them. All of them are drinking wine and eating meat. I can't even describe how content they look! By contrast, I don't even remember when was the last time the seven of us tasted meat on Volcano Island."

Ning laughed as well. This Feiyou truly was a remarkable figure. The Empyrean Gods had all come to Undermoon Lake to adventure, and all of them were filled with heroic aspirations. Thus, even if they were to bring some wine and meat, they would only bring a little bit, as it would all eventually spoil and rot away. There was no way to keep meat from spoiling over the course of ten million years. Thus, after spending enough time in Undermoon Lake, the only way to find meat to eat was to do what Feiyou did; prepare an entire minor world full of livestock and wild beasts to eat. Only then would there be a steady source of meat.

“Brother Darknorth, don’t laugh at me, I beg,” Feiyou said with a laugh. “My willpower is weak, and I delight in wine and meat. I can endure being unable to make any progress in my cultivation, but I simply can’t be without wine and meat. Nothing to eat, nothing to drink...what’s the point of Immortality if that’s the case?!”

“Even in the Three Realms, I’ve heard of your famous name, big brother Feiyou. In fact...you have a nickname these days: ‘Relentless Until Dead’,” Ning said with a laugh.

“Relentless Until Dead?” Feiyou stared, then began to roar with laughter.

“Right, Relentless Until Dead.” The nearby Witherdragon nodded. “This kid did indeed say that he would only stop drinking wine and eating meat when he died. This is why he was nicknamed ‘Relentless Until Dead’.”

After drinking and eating for quite some time, the Empyrean Gods ended up splitting off into two groups. One group was formed from the ten who had made it here on their own power, Ji Ning included, and the second group was formed of all the rest.

Ning looked at the nine before him. Of the nine, seven belonged to the Nuwa Alliance, while the other two most likely were of the Seamless Gate.

Everyone who entered during the Primordial Era belonged to the Nuwa Alliance. It wasn’t until later on during the era of the Three Realms, when the Lord of All Fiends came back after Mother Nuwa departed, that the Seamless Gate’s Immortals and Fiends began to enter this place as well. Thus, there were naturally far fewer Seamless Gate members in Undermoon Lake.

“They all seem to be extremely good friends with each other.” Ning mused to himself, “If they knew of the storm going on outside...there would probably be no way for them to remain as friendly as they are now. They treat each other as brothers, holding nothing back at all.”

Because of how friendly the Nuwa Alliance members and Seamless Gate members on the third island were to each other, Ning, Roughpeak, and

the Seven Dragon Gods decided to temporarily withhold information regarding the war outside. None of the others knew of the war, and here in Undermoon Lake, there was no need for them to be made aware of it right away.

“Brother Darknorth.” The winged Empyrean God Autumnwing said, “The nine of us sought you out because we need to tell you something.”

“Eh?” Ning was puzzled. He immediately began to listen carefully.

“The path to the next island is incredibly dangerous, and it is filled with terrors. Myriad Mountains Island, however, is much safer, and there’s no ‘millennial invasions’ like on the first two islands.” Autumnwing looked at Ning. “But Undermoon Lake won’t let us just live here forever in peace and relaxation. Undermoon Lake isn’t meant to serve as a place for rearing useless people, after all.”

Ning nodded.

“Normally, Myriad Mountains Island is completely safe; it’s rare for a single dangerous event to happen in even a hundred million years. But... whenever a new Empyrean God enters the island...” Autumnwing looked at Ning. “Then a terrifying calamity will descend upon Undermoon Lake.”

“A calamity?” Ning was puzzled.

The nearby Empyrean God Oddwitch narrowed his eyes. He said in a gravelly voice, “Right. A calamity! Whenever a new Empyrean God arrives, the calamity will soon come as well. A short period of time from now, an army of demons will descend upon Undermoon Lake. When that happens, the only choice will be for the ten of us to meet them in battle. As for the other Empyrean Gods, they aren’t qualified to take part because we brought them here. If they take part in battle, they will enrage Undermoon Lake...and they will all die.”

Ning nodded, then asked curiously, “An army of demons?”

“Prior this this, you encountered a yaksha and Snowfiend; they are all considered ‘demons’. What we will encounter, however, is an entire army composed of such demons.” Oddwitch continued, “An army will attack,

and only the ten of us are permitted to defend. It will be a truly life-threatening battle, and in the past, there have generally been deaths amongst our ranks. In fact, on one occasion four Empyrean Gods ended up dying! There's only been a single time where none of us died."

"Thus...if things unfold as they normally do, one or two of the ten of us will die." Feiyou looked towards Ning. "We're telling you this now so that you will mentally prepare yourself."

"Alright." Ning nodded.

"In truth, the invading army is Undermoon Lake's way of forcing us to remain vigilant and not be too lazy and relaxed here on Myriad Mountains Island. We must often go visit the wooden bridge and temper ourselves." Empyrean God Cloudscar sighed. "Only by constantly tempering ourselves and constantly growing stronger will we have a chance to survive once new Empyrean Gods arrive and bring calamity with them."

Cloudscar looked at Ning. "Brother Darknorth, because all ten of us have to work together to fight against our many foes, teamwork is absolutely critical. Before we can work together, we need to understand how strong you are and what you are skilled in. Only then can we come up with a good strategy."

"Understood." Ning nodded.

"The most powerful of us nine is big brother Feiyou. We'll let him spar with you first. You don't need to hold back at all. Only by understanding what areas you are strong in and what areas you are weak in will we be able to work together," Cloudscar said.

"Hahaha...I'm not really the strongest. Cloudscar is the most agile, while Zhenbu is the most ferocious. I simply have the most stable frontal attacks." Feiyou let out a laugh. "Brother Darknorth, are you ready? Once you are ready, I'm going to attack."

Chapter 18: Wuji Births Taiji

Atop the vast wilderness, the white-robed Ji Ning stood facing the fur-clad Empyrean God Feiyou. Off in the distance, more than a hundred Empyrean Gods were watching them.

“Although Myriad Mountains Island doesn’t suffer from the ‘millennial invasion’, it suffers from an even more terrifying calamity whenever a new Empyrean God arrives. The Empyrean Gods who can make it to this place are all tremendously powerful...and yet, almost every single time, some will die when the calamity arrives.” Empyrean God Roughpeak shook his head and sighed.

“Only a deadly threat like this can stir us into becoming more powerful. The stronger you become, the greater your chances will be of making it to the next island,” Empyrean God Witherdragon said solemnly.

This was the third island. The fourth island was next. As for the fifth island, there were no dangers there; upon reaching it, one would be permitted to leave. Thus, all of the Empyrean Gods who had made it to the third island were extremely powerful. As for the ones on the fourth island, they were just one step away from leaving this place.

The tribulations on the third island weren’t meant for the Empyrean Gods who had given up to face; they were meant for the stronger Empyrean Gods who had made it here under their own power.

“Be careful, brother Darknorth.” A pair of short black halberds appeared in Feiyou’s hands.

“Short halberds?” Ning was startled.

According to the reports he had read, during the Primordial Era, Empyrean God Feiyou didn’t use short halberds as his weapons.

“Here in Undermoon Lake, when watching the Purgatory God, I ended up discovering weapons that suited me even better than my old ones.” Feiyou looked at Ning. “Although the Purgatory God and I both use twin halberds...I’m much more formidable than him.”

“After you.” A pair of blood-red swords appeared in Ning’s hands.

The hundred-plus spectating Empyrean Gods all held their breaths. Through this fight, they would be able to find out exactly how powerful this newly-arrived Empyrean God Darknorth was! If he was truly powerful, they would all stand a better chance of surviving once the calamity came.

Of course, the calamity posed no danger to the Empyrean Gods who had given up, but it was deadly to the other Empyrean Gods who had brought them here. They had watched many of their benefactors die over the years, and they hoped that less would die this time.

Swoosh. Feiyou transformed into a streak of light, flying towards Ning. Ning also transformed into a streak of light, going forward to engage.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The twin swords collided against the twin halberds in midair. Upon exchanging blows, Ning was shocked: “Eh? Empyrean God Feiyou’s short halberd technique is identical to the Purgatory God’s?” Thanks to his earlier experience battling against the Purgatory God, it was fairly easy for Ning to deal with Feiyou’s attacks. In turn, Ning put his sword-arts on full display. This spar was mainly meant so that the other nine Empyrean Gods would have a good understanding of Ning’s abilities, allowing them to cooperate better once the calamity came.

Swish.

A queer, unpredictable sword-light lashed out, flashing towards Feiyou’s neck. Fortunately, the short halberd managed to block in time.

Swish.

Yet another bizarre streak of sword-light, this one black. It scraped upwards towards Feiyou’s body, but Feiyou managed to once more block it with a clever twist of his halberd.

“This Darknorth fellow...what a strange, fast sword-art he has.”

“His sword-art is both fast and unpredictable. The Dao of the Sword

really is well-suited to launching attacks.”

“Formidable.”

“Yes, quite formidable. This sword-art alone is enough to allow him to overcome the Purgatory God.”

Cloudscar, Eastvoid, Seasonstep, and the others all sighed in amazement. Although they had all made it past the Purgatory God as well, none of them walked upon the Dao of the Sword! From Ning’s sword-arts, they were able to get a sense of how deadly and dangerous an expert of the Dao of the Sword could be.

As for Roughpeak and the Seven Dragon Gods, their eyes shone as they watched. Although Ning had brought them to this place, they had never truly seen Ning fight with full power as he was right now.

Boom!

The two clashed together then separated, landing on the ground.

Feiyou said excitedly, “Brother Darknorth, although I was at a disadvantage, that was just the warmup. We were just getting a bit familiar with each other. Now...I’m going to fight for real.” After speaking, Feiyou’s aura changed in a subtle manner. Transforming into a streak of light, he once more charged towards Ning, and as soon as they exchanged attacks, Ning could sense that Feiyou’s short halberd techniques had changed...

It was no longer the technique the Purgatory God had used. It was an even more exquisite technique.

Although Ning was skilled in attacking, for a time Ning was unable to seize the upper hand again. Clearly, the amount of time Feiyou had spent on this island had resulted in him perfecting his short halberd technique to a level that was far superior to Ning’s sword-arts.

“Formidable, formidable.” After battling for a short while, Ning laughed. “Big brother Feiyou, I’m wondering how strong your protective divine abilities are?”

After speaking, Ning no longer moved to dodge. He allowed his opponent's halberds to land on him as he sent his own swords howling towards Feiyou. Feiyou was so terrified that even the look on his face changed. He hurriedly pulled back his halberds to block Ning's attacks instead.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Feiyou was repeatedly knocked backwards. He called out in a loud voice, "Is this the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art]?!"

"The Ninth Cycle of the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art]," Ning chortled.

"That's CHEATING!" Feiyou was furious. If Ning was a bit weaker than him, then he would've still been able to suppress Ning, even though Ning had the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art] guarding his body. But since the two were equal in power...for Ning to be able to focus solely on offense meant that he had an enormous advantage.

"Who is your master?" Feiyou roared. "He actually let you train in the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art], and you even reached the Ninth Cycle!"

"My master? Daofather Subhuti." Ning chortled happily. "Jealous? Envious?"

"Daofather Subhuti? You have such bullshit luck!" The more Feiyou fought, the angrier he became as he was being beaten into an increasingly sorry state. "Enough, enough! I already know that you have a powerful protective divine ability. Stop abusing it, alright?"

Seeing that the point had been made, Ning stopped 'cheating'. He began to fight normally, no longer relying on the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art] to protect him and instead using his swords to block the enemy's attacking halberds.

This sort of fight was much more interesting, anyways.

"I didn't know that brother Darknorth had actually reached the Ninth Cycle of the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art]. This is going to be wonderful." Oddwitch chortled merrily, "When the demon army comes, brother Coppersong, we won't need you soak up all the damage all by yourself like a target dummy, like we normally would. This time, brother

Darknorth can work together with you to take them on.”

In the face of an army of demons, they would indeed need Fiendgods with incredibly tough bodies to withstand the front-line blows for them.

The muscular Coppersong, his entire body shimmering with an ancient copper aura, said in a low voice, “The [Eight-Nine Arcane Art] which brother Darknorth has trained in is the number one divine ability below the True God level. Although I’ve had some fortuitous encounters, my divine body isn’t a match for brother Darknorth’s. This time, brother Darknorth will have to serve as the vanguard for taking on the enemy’s attacks.”

“My word! Coppersong, you big dumb lunk...you’ve learned how to take advantage of others?”

“He actually understands the principle of letting someone else charge in front of him!”

The others all laughed.

Coppersong stared at them. “I had to do that because none of you have tough enough divine bodies. In the past, I served as the vanguard because I had no other choice, and was just barely up to the task. However, Ji Ning’s divine body is even tougher than mine. That’s the Ninth Cycle of the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art] we are talking about! His body is akin to a supreme Pure Yang Treasure. Even a True God or Daofather would find it difficult to destroy such a body.”

“In both the Primordial Era and the era of the Three Realms, very few have been able to reach the Ninth Cycle of the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art]. Every single person who succeeded was not only tremendously talented but also doted upon heavily by a True God or Daofather. There’s no need for someone like that to enter Undermoon Lake, right?”

“That’s true.”

“There really is no need for someone who a Daofather holds in such favor to enter Undermoon Lake.”

All of them were quite puzzled.

Generally speaking, the people who entered Undermoon Lake during the Primordial Era and the era of the Three Realms were people who felt that they had no chance of becoming a True God or Daofather. This was why they were willing to risk everything here in Undermoon Lake. In addition, not even emerging from Undermoon Lake was a guarantee that one would succeed. Buddha Jueming, for example; a long time passed after his departure from Undermoon Lake before he became a Buddha.

Thus, Undermoon Lake really didn't make much of a difference! Everyone who came in was just gambling with their lives. As for the truly supreme geniuses like Lu Dongbin, Redsnow, and Sun Wukong, none of them would actually enter such a place.

But of course, although the likes of Feiyou, Oddwitch, and the others had been fairly ordinary in strength when they had entered, thanks to Undermoon Lake, they had been trained to the point where they all verily gleamed with talent and power. The nine of them had all reached the fourth level of forces such as taiji-force. In the Three Realms, they would be viewed with great importance by the True Gods and Daofathers. From this, one could see how effective Undermoon Lake's training regime was.

BOOM!

Suddenly, a colossal explosion could be heard. The shockwave caused the earth to crack like the shell of a turtle, and the nearest mountain began to tremble as well, causing many boulders to fall down.

The power of this collision caused all the distant spectators to be badly shocked.

"How fierce!" Feiyou retreated a long distance, staring towards Ning in shock.

"You blocked it?!" Ning was shocked as well.

"What happened just now? Y-you...how did you suddenly make your sword-arts increase in power by that much?" Feiyou was shocked.

"Just now, I filled my sword with fourth-stage heartforce," Ning explained. "With heartforce supporting my attack, the strength naturally

increased dramatically.”

Buyou was stunned. “Fourth-stage heartforce? You’ve not only reached the fourth stage of swordforce, but also the fourth stage of heartforce? And...but...even if you have reached the fourth stage of heartforce, how could you pour it into your sword? Did you come up with a heartforce sword-technique?”

Heartforce was an invisible, ephemeral thing. Even major powers were often bedeviled by the question of how to apply it.

“And you?” Ning was puzzled as well. “Just now, your halberd techniques...” He clearly had released a maximum-strength blow; he had unleashed swordforce, heartforce, and even the [Starseizing Hand]. Although he had knocked Feiyou backwards, Feiyou had still successfully blocked the attack. Ning had seen the blurry image of a taiji diagram appear before Feiyou, and it felt as though his attack had been trapped into an endless vortex.

“That’s a new technique that I just came up with,” Feiyou said with a laugh. “My infiniforce has reached the fourth stage, while my taiji-force has only reached the second stage. However...the infinite Wuji gives birth to the supreme Taiji. Infiniforce and taiji-force can be joined together, and so I came up with this technique that does just that, which is why it is so defensively powerful.” 1

Ning couldn’t help but sigh in awe. Impressive.

He naturally knew that some of the supreme types of force could be merged together. For example, timeforce and spaceforce could join together. Redsnow had managed to join them together into spacetime-force, which was why Subhuti was so delighted with him and had taken him on as his disciple.

However, only certain matching, suitable forces could be joined together.

For example, there would be no way to join swordforce together with saberforce. They simply didn’t have anything to do with each other; there was no way to forcibly join them together.

Wuji gave birth to Taiji, and so the two could join together perfectly. Even though Feiyou had only reached the second stage of taiji-force, upon joining these two types of force together the results were quite shocking.

“That’s why I said that I was the stablest and most unshakable of the nine. I can withstand even the attacks of Empyrean God Zhenbu, who has the most ferocious attacks of us all.” Feiyou looked at Ning, then let out an amazed sigh. “But in terms of ferociousness, you are a bit superior to even Zhenbu. Impressive, quite impressive.”

Ning said hurriedly, “Heartforce is different from other types of energy. There’s no way to sustainably attack using heartforce; if I attacked repeatedly with it, I would only be able to launch a bit over ten attacks.”

“Oh...” Feiyou now understood. He shook his head. “A pity...”

“Still, your power surpasses my expectations. We need to make some careful arrangements...and then, the only thing for us to do is wait. Roughly ten days or so from now, the demon army of Undermoon Lake will attack.” Feiyou let out a laugh. “When the time comes, then ten of us shall work together to engage our foes!”

*

1. This phrase, ‘Wuji births Taiji’, is one of the most famous phrases in Daoism, and you can find out more in the ‘basic primer to Daoism’ on Wuxiaworld. Wuji means ‘infinity’ or ‘limitless’, while Taiji means ‘the supreme’. The full saying is, Wuji gives birth to Taiji, which gives birth to (the duality of) Liangyi. The duality is known as Yin and Yang, and the transformations of Yin and Yang are known as the (four phenomenon) Sixiang, which are reflected within the world as the (eight trigrams) Bagua. You can think of it as $0 \Rightarrow 1 \Rightarrow 2 \Rightarrow 4 \Rightarrow 8$

Chapter 19: An Army of Demons

The sparring match Ji Ning engaged in after arriving at Myriad Mountains Island resulted in Oddwitch, Zhenbu, and the others being filled with joy. Although all of them looked quite relaxed and carefree, the truth was that they all knew a calamity was about to arrive...and it was almost guaranteed that at least one of them would die. They all felt an invisible form of pressure in their hearts.

At a time like this, the stronger Ning proved himself to be, the happier they would be!

Time flowed on, one day at a time.

The ten Empyrean Gods all prepared quietly for the battle.

Ning and the nine Empyrean Gods were currently discussing battle strategies within a palace.

“What? We aren’t allowed to use formations?” Ning was shocked.

“Of course not.” Oddwitch said calmly, “If you use formations, the demon army will use formations as well. They vastly outnumber us, which means we’ll be at a major disadvantage! This is hard-earned experience, taught to us by those who came before us. If we don’t use formations, the demon armies won’t use formations either.”

“How strange.” Ning was puzzled. Why was it that if they didn’t use formations, the demons wouldn’t use formations either?

“Why is this?” Ning didn’t understand.

“Put yourself in the position of the creator of Undermoon Lake and you will understand.” Zhenbu laughed. “The creator of Undermoon Lake wished to temper us, making us become more powerful. If we rely on formations, such as the Seven Planets God, then in truth only a single Empyrean God will actually be fighting, with the other six just responsible for pumping enough divine power. This is against the goals of the creator of Undermoon Lake, and so he naturally would not be willing to allow us to rely on formations. He wants us to rely on our own power to

battle against our foes, using these struggles to temper ourselves.”

Ning instantly understood. Laughing, he said, “Come to think of it, I really wonder why the creator of Undermoon Lake spent all this effort in building this place up.”

“We’re quite curious as well.”

“Yes, why did he do this?”

“I imagine that only Jueming, who managed to escape, knows the answer. Darknorth, you’ve just recently entered from the outside world; has Jueming ever spoken of what the creator of Undermoon Lake wants?”

The nine Empyrean Gods were all puzzled.

Ning shook his head. “Buddha Jueming has completely sealed his lips regarding the affairs of Undermoon Lake.”

“He became a Buddha?” Seasonstep called out in surprise.

“The Seven Dragon Gods mentioned it earlier. Didn’t you hear them?”

“I was daydreaming.”

“You? An exalted Empyrean God? Daydreaming?”

“The calamity’s drawing near, you know...I can’t help but think about the demon army attacking. What, I’m not allowed to daydream?”

No formations would be allowed. They would have to risk their lives individually. The main thing they had to be careful about was staying close to each other, so that once one of them fell into a dangerous situation the others could immediately help out. Only by supporting each other would they be able to fight against the demon army invasion.

In the blink of an eye, twenty-one days had passed after Ning’s arrival at Myriad Mountains Island.

Ever since the tenth day, the ten Empyrean Gods had begun to live together, prepared to do battle at all times. On this day, a cold wind blew through the skies, which remained as blurry as always. The bright moon could still be seen hanging up in the heavens. And finally...

“AWOOOOOOOO!!!!” A distant, earth-shaking howl could be heard coming from the west side of Myriad Mountains Lake.

“Eh?”

Ten figures simultaneously flew out of the palace like streaks of light, arriving at the peak of the nearest mountain. The ten of them were like the gods of this place as they turned their gazes in unison towards the distance.

“They’ve come,” Feiyou said in a low voice.

“They’ve finally come.” Zhenbu licked his lips.

“Remember, Darknorth.” Oddwitch looked at the nearby Ning. “Don’t charge too far up ahead. Although you have the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art] and can charge into their ranks...once you are all by yourself and surrounded by their army, with no one to help you out and the demon king assaulting you...you’ll die shortly afterwards.”

“Understood.” Ning nodded.

The demon army had many demons that were comparable to ordinary Empyrean Gods in power. They also had demon commanders who were equivalent to the ten of them in power...and a demon king who was even mightier than all of them!

The more Empyrean Gods took part in battle, the more demons and demon commanders would take part as well.

Because ten Empyrean Gods would take part in this battle, ten demon commanders would take part as well!

“You have to be beware the demon commanders. Each of the ten are comparable to us in power. Those countless damnable minor demons are particularly irritating. Although they are weak in sole combat, they can tie you down and have a major impact on how much power you can unleash. We have to stay close to each other and support each other. No matter what, we can’t let the demons split us apart.” Coppersong couldn’t help but remind Ning yet again.

“Right.” Ning nodded.

He understood. Everyone had told him this repeatedly, as the nine of them had all experienced this calamity before. It was precisely because they had experienced this before that all of them were so worried that Ning would mess up! During a critical, life-and-death moment like this...a single error would result in certain doom!

Thud! Thud! Thud!!!

The ground was trembling.

The ten Empyrean Gods stared off into the distance. They saw a terrifying, awe-inspiring horde of demons appear off in the distance. These demons had completely dark-green skins, and they wielded sabers, spears, warforks, and other types of weapons. Some of the demons were the particularly muscular commanders who were each many meters tall. The demon commanders had skin that was a dark-red color.

“Those big ones are the demon commanders.”

“Look; that one over there with the long horns? That’s the demon king.” Feiyou and the others provided guidance to Ning. In truth, Ning had more or less come to the same conclusion on his own, as the two horns were nearly three meters long, and the creature had the most powerful aura of all.

“AROOOO!!!” The the demon king was carrying a golden gourd around his waist and wielded a black longstaff in his hands. Raising his head, he let out a fierce roar.

“ARROOO ARROOO!!!!” The horde of demons roared as well.

The ten Empyrean Gods all watched with solemn expressions.

Far off in the distance, the Seven Dragon Gods, Roughpeak, and the rest of the Empyrean Gods watched nervously.

“The calamity has come yet again.”

“I hope all of them will survive this one.”

Their hands were tied. If they were to take part in the battle, the only

result would be that even more demons would appear. Thus, their only choice was to stay on the sidelines and watch. The only reason they were even able to come to Myriad Mountains Island was because they had followed more powerful Empyrean Gods here...but in almost every single calamity, at least one of them would die! To them, these dead Empyrean Gods were their benefactors!

In a similar manner, the Seven Dragon Gods and Roughpeak didn't wish for Ning to die. None of them wanted for any of the ten to die.

"I hope brother Darknorth and the others will all live," Witherdragon said.

"Let's go."

Upon their leader Feiyou issuing the order, the ten Empyrean Gods who stood at the peak of the mountain all transformed into streaks of light. They flew tens of thousands of kilometers towards another, rather strange-looking mountain. The reason why this place was known as 'Myriad Mountains Island' was because there truly was a myriad of different mountain peaks that stabbed high up into the skies!

The mountain that Ning and the rest of the ten had chosen was one which was a perfect fit for them.

They weren't able to set up formations, but at least they would be able to select the terrain of their choosing! A well-chosen region could help to ensure that the demon armies wouldn't be able to join together and completely surround them, which would make the battle even more difficult.

"My brothers!" Feiyou roared loudly, "Let's survive to drink together again!"

"Survive to drink together again!"

"Survive to drink together again!"

The other nine, Ning included, all howled furiously as they stared at the distant, impending demon army. Their hearts were all filled with a desire to slaughter! They had no choice; they had to kill. If they didn't, they

would die.

The demon army drew closer...ever closer!

A million kilometers. Six hundred thousand kilometers. Three hundred thousand kilometers!

Even the weakest demon was comparable to an ordinary Empyrean God. They moved with astonishing speed, quickly charging forward towards the ten.

“AROOOO!!! Slaughter them all, my children!” The demon king bellowed in a loud voice.

Instantly, all the demons grew even more excited.

“Kill!” Feiyou let out an explosive shout of his own.

“KILL!” The nine Empyrean Gods had all drawn their weapons long ago.

BOOOM!!!!

It was like a tidalwave smashing into dry rocks. The ten Empyrean Gods, their backs to the mountain walls, were instantly flooded by wild attacks from the countless demons.

Ning instantly began to use the [Brightmoon] sword-art with his twin swords, deflecting the oncoming spears, warforks, machetes, and other weapons.

Sword-light flew forward in a strange, unpredictable manner.

Slash!

A demon's head went flying.

Clang! The sword-light scraped down the side of a machete, chopping a pudgy demon in half.

Every so often, Ning would also execute the ‘Soleheart’ stance and the ‘Yin-Yang’ stance, his two defensive stances. When suffering attacks from so many demons, maintaining a strong defense was clearly quite important. Otherwise, once the demons managed to close in on him, he wouldn't even have enough room to use his sword-arts. He would be

finished if that happened.

“According to what big brother Feiyou and the others said, we have to wipe out these ordinary demons as fast as possible. The faster, the better! Although they are weak, it’ll be these little demons who end up sending us into hell at critical moments.” Ning didn’t dare to be overconfident. Although he had the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art] protecting him...if he was to be completely surrounded and bound, then the demon king would be able to easily suppress him and draw him into that golden gourd.

Chapter 20: Half-Step Daofather

The demon king wielded a long black staff in his hands. Surrounding him were the ten dark-red demon commanders! They simply watched from afar, allowing the many demons under their commands to surround and assault the ten Empyrean Gods.

Ji Ning and the others knew that each time, the leaders of the demon army would allow the ordinary demons to attack first for a time. Only later would the demon commanders and demon king attack. Thus, the initial period of time when only the ordinary demon soldiers were attacking was extremely critical; they had to seize that period of time to wipe out as many of the ordinary demons as they could.

It was a wild, berserk battle.

Boom! Every so often, Ning would ram forwards, relying on his tough divine body to smash into the demons and knock them asunder. At other times, he would use a sword-art that would transform his swords into a black hole, guiding the demons off to one side. In short, he used every method he could think of to ensure that the demons would not be able to completely surround and restrain him.

“Intriguing.” The demon king pointed towards the distant Ning with a slender, knife-like claw. “Look at that new Empyrean God. His sword-arts are quite powerful, and he’s killing the fastest.”

“This divine body is quite tough. Our children’s weapons and attacks are negligible to him.”

“His sword-arts are quite odd.”

The demon king and the dark-red demon commanders chatted amongst themselves.

“According to what Purgatory said, this new Empyrean God is named Darknorth.” The demon king chuckled. “Number three, go and play with him a bit.”

“Alright.” Instantly, a muscular demon commander who was wielding a

shield in each of his two hands charged forward towards Ning. The ordinary demons all parted before this demon commander, clearing a path for him. Soon, he closed in on Ji Ning.

“Ji Ning, be careful.”

“Brother Darknoth, be careful.”

“It’s the twinshield commander!”

The other nine Empyrean Gods hurriedly sent mental messages over to Ning. Ning felt a sense of shock in his heart as well. Because Feiyou and the other Empyrean Gods had experienced multiple battles against the demon king and his commanders, they had naturally memorized the appearances of quite a few of them. Each of the commanders had their own unique traits, and this one, the ‘twinshield commander’, possessed enormous strength and was extremely skilled in defense.

“Of the demon king’s commanders, the twinshield commander is probably the best counter to me.” This thought flashed through Ning’s mind as the dark-red twinshield commander came charging towards him.

“Die!” Twin shields in hand, the demon commander rammed towards Ning. These two shields protected almost every single inch of his body. No matter how formidable Ning’s sword-arts were, there was no way for him to touch this foe.

“Heavenbreaker stance!” Ning charged forward as well, his twin swords becoming as heavy as mountains. He sent them smashing downwards with an aura of power like Pangu cleaving apart Heaven and Earth.

BOOM!

The two swords smote down upon the shields, but the demon commander was still able to maintain his charge towards Ning with shields raised. Clearly, Ning didn’t have any advantages in terms of strength. The many ordinary demons around him also joined in the fight, wildly assaulting Ning and causing his movements to turn chaotic. Now, he truly understood why the demons he had so easily killed were said to be truly deadly.

While Ning was forced to concentrate on the demon commander, the ordinary demons continued to launch stabbing strikes against him, making his life miserable.

“Three heads, six arms!” Ning’s body momentarily blurred as he executed the [Three Heads, Six Arms] divine ability. Instantly, six streaks of sword-light began to fly about, sweeping the area around him clear of lesser demons while completely stalemating the twin bucklers.

“Number four, you go as well,” the distant demon king instructed.

“Yes.”

The dark-red demon commander referred to as ‘number four’ also had six arms. Each of his six arms held a whip, and he let out a howl as he charged towards Ning. His arrival instantly put Ning into an even more dangerous situation.

If Ning was just fighting against this ‘number four’ by himself, he would be able to easily defend against him. In fact, he would even hold the advantage. But right now, the twin shields were the primary threat, while the six whips of ‘number four’ coiled about his swords, making it difficult for Ning to execute his sword-arts. At the same time, the lesser demons continuously charged forward, trying to trap and constrict Ning.

“ARUUUUUUU!” The two demon commanders and many lesser demon furiously assaulted Ning like a wave that was about to drown him.

“Not good.”

“I’ll go!”

The person nearest to Ning was the most muscular of the ten Empyrean Gods, Empyrean God Zhenbu. Letting out a mighty roar, he slaughtered a path through his opponents and charged straight towards the twinshield demon commander. The twinshield commander had been in the middle of launching an attack against Ning, and so was only able to use a single shield to defend against the valiant Zhenbu.

“F*ck off!” Zhenbu’s longspear pierced out, and a mighty whirlpool appeared at the tip of it. It latched onto the bottom of the shield, tugging

it straight into the heart of the whirlpool. Zhenbu then gave the spear a mighty tug.

This attack contained a strange force that was both upwards and downwards. Even the twinshield commander was unable to withstand it, and he was sent flying into the air.

“Perfect.”

Sword-light flashed.

[Starseizing Hand]!

Swordforce

Heartforce!

[Brightmoon] sword-art, Blood Drop stance!

This was Ning’s fastest sword of all. As the twinshield commander flew into the air, an opening was revealed in his defenses. Ning saw it and immediately stabbed his sword into the demon commander’s chest. “Arghh!” The twinshield commander glared furiously at Ning, then vanished into thin air. Even his shield vanished with him.

“Well struck!”

“Excellent!”

“One down.”

The other nine Empyrean Gods instantly celebrated. They had never imagined that Ning, forced into such dire straits, would actually be able to slay the twinshield commander.

In truth, as soon as he been forced into that dire situation, Ning had immediately prepared to unleash his full power. However, in a situation like that, he would at most be able to force the enemy back a bit. Fortunately, Zhenbu had also charged over, forcing the twinshield commander to reveal a flaw in his defenses and giving Ning the chance to launch a full-strength attack to kill him.

“Beautiful.” Zhenbu looked towards Ning, laughing loudly, “Even if I

didn't intervene, a puny demon like that wouldn't have been able to do anything to you, brother Darknorth."

Ning, however, felt a complicated feeling in his heart.

In truth, ever since he had arrived at Myriad Mountains Island, Ning had felt lumps in his throat whenever he looked at these nine Empyrean Gods, especially Zhenbu and Autumnwing, who belonged to the Seamless Gate. This was because he knew very well that their two alliances had already entered a deadly war in the outside world! But here in Undermoon Lake, none of the Empyrean Gods knew of the war. These nine Empyrean Gods in particular had undergone many calamities together; they had long ago begun to view each other as brothers for life.

"It doesn't matter. They might be of the Seamless Gate, but they are both my brothers," Ning mused to himself as he stared at the heroic Zhenbu, who had been so concerned about him.

After the twinshield commander was slain, the six-armed demon commander hurriedly retreated.

The distant demon king frowned upon seeing this happen.

"Hm?" The demon king ordered with a frown, "Attack."

The eight demon commanders instantly grew excited. The demon king gently stroked the golden gourd by his waist, then hoisted his black longstaff with a cold smile and strode towards Ning. "The rest of you can deal with the other nine. Leave this Empyrean God Darknorth to me."

"Understood."

"Empyrean God Darknorth is doomed."

"Doomed."

The demon commanders all charged towards their respective targets. Aside from Ning, whom they weren't familiar with, they knew the Empyrean Gods quite well. They were able to choose whichever target suited them the most, but the Empyrean Gods didn't have that luxury; they were being surrounded and attacked by too many demons! They were

also far slower than the demon commanders in movement speed.

“Careful. They are all coming.” Feiyou let out a loud roar. This was the critical moment; when the demon commanders all attacked in unison, the Empyrean Gods would easily be at risk of death or injury!

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The demon commanders battled furiously against their respective Empyrean God opponents, with crowds of lesser demons assisting them!

As for Ning, however...he was under the attack of the most terrifying demon of them all. The demon king.

“You actually killed number three.” The demon king wielded the long black staff in his hands, filled with an overpowering aura that caused even Ning to feel pressure. The demon king strode forward with wide steps, causing the earth to shake. “I want to see exactly how strong you are. All of you, step aside.”

Whoosh. The surrounding demons all gave way.

The demon king suddenly leapt into the air, soaring straight towards Ning with both hands around his staff, delivering a mighty, smashing blow towards Ning’s head.

Clang. The three-headed, six-armed Ning sent all six of his swords into an upwards block.

BOOOOOOOM!!

A deep hole appeared in the ground, with Ning having been smashed straight underground.

As for the demon king, he held the long black staff in a single-handed grip as he charged towards that hole with an aura of astonishing power!

Boom! A streak of sword-light flew out from the ground, with Ning ensconced within it.

“What an incredible aura.” Ning’s heart was shaking. This demon king was far too powerful, much stronger than Ning himself. Ning had used all six swords in order to block a single strike from the enemy, and one of the

swords had been reinforced by heartforce. But it was useless! He had still been smashed underground. Clearly, the difference in power between them was enormous.

The demon king leapt high into the sky, soaring through the air as he chased after the fleeing Ning. In terms of power or speed, the demon king was definitely superior to Ning.

Boom!

Bang!

Ning was knocked everywhere; high, low, left, right...but thanks to the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art] protecting him, the demon king remained unable to harm Ning. What Ning had to do was to use every tool available to him to ensure that his foe wouldn't be able to trap or bind him. Ning's sword-arts were still quite formidable, and thanks to his six arms the lesser demons were unable to even move close to him. This made it so that the demon king didn't have a chance to use the golden gourd to absorb Ning.

"Being dominated and trampled like this pisses me off. This demon king is way too strong." Suddenly, Ning's face changed.

"Attack."

"Shit!"

Faced with attacks from nine demon commanders and many lesser demons, Feiyou, Zhenbu, and the rest of the nine were trapped in a quagmire. Even Ning, when facing off against two demon commanders and many lesser demons, had been in a dangerous situation. Although the demon king seemed powerful, he was simply very fast and very strong; as long as one was able to withstand his attacks, one would only be knocked flying; there was no risk of dying to him.

During the last calamity, it had been Feiyou who had withstood the demon king's attacks. In terms of defensive techniques, he was actually far superior to Ning, and so he was able to withstand even the demon king.

During this calamity...the demon king had sought out Ning. Clearly, he

didn't want to deal with the troublesome Empyrean God Feiyou, whose defenses were airtight.

As time passed, the positions of the other nine Empyrean Gods grew increasingly dire. Being at a constant disadvantage would, sooner or later, lead to catastrophe. Based on their past experiences, only after one of the Empyrean Gods died would these demons relax a bit with their attacks.

The ten Empyrean Gods each had their own abilities.

Empyrean God Cloudscar had amazing agility techniques that vastly surpassed the techniques of Ning and the rest of the other nine. Surrounded by an army of demons, he was still like an unpredictable cloud that manifested and dissipated at will. He moved about constantly, continuously launching attacks.

Empyrean God Feiyou's forte was defense. Not even the demon king was able to do anything to him, and he was naturally in quite a stable position right now as well. However, his attacks were weak. When surrounded and trapped, it was difficult for him to assist the others.

After battling for a long period of time...Empyrean Gods Eastvoid and Zhenbu fell into danger! Although the other Empyrean Gods had helped them out two or three times, there was no way they could be there every time.

"Shit!" Zhenbu let out a furious roar.

"These damned demons." Eastvoid was growing frantic as well. Both of them specialized in attacking, and so they were in similar, incredibly dire straits right now. Many scars had already appeared on both of their bodies.

"Eastvoid and Zhenbu are almost done for," Feiyou said through a frantic mental roar as he did his best to charge towards them.

"Feiyou? Don't even think about going over there." A demon commander who wielded clanking chains let out a bizarre laugh as he sent his chains lashing outwards, forcibly preventing Feiyou from moving past him.

"Darknorth!" Oddwitch sent out a frantic mental shout as well.

Boom!

The demon king sent out yet another smashing staff blow, knocking Ning aside. Ning grew frantic as well. “There’s no way for me to move close to them.” He was barely able to keep himself safe from the demon king as it was.

Slash! A blade scraped past Eastvoid’s waist. A gaping wound instantly appeared, and fresh blood came spurting out from it. Moments later, a wave of divine power flowed over the wound and quickly healed it.

“My divine power is almost depleted,” Eastvoid sent mentally. Each time his body was injured, a large amount of divine power would be used up to heal it.

“Eastvoid.”

“Brother Eastvoid.”

The other Empyrean Gods were all frantic. Once his divine power was used up...no one would be able to help him.

.....

Within the quiet Still Room.

Down below, there was a golden light formation of three hundred meters.

Up above, there was a black light formation of three hundred meters.

Ning was seated in the meditative position between the two. Spheres of Ninefire Lava and Iceheart Pith were floating in front of him, and a large amount of the essence of the two was flowing into the two diagrams. The two spheres had already shrank significantly.

“I’ll have to halt for now.”

Ning willed it, and both great formations slowly vanished into thin air. As for the two spheres of Ninefire Lava and Iceheart Pith, they flew back into their respective jade bottles.

As for Ning, he landed on the ground.

“Although my Pure Yang Jindan still needs upgrading...I have no choice but to halt for now. After the battle, I’ll continue the upgrade process.” Ning took a look inside his body. The gleaming, spinning golden pellet Jindan within his body had an aura that was already tens of times more powerful than it had been previously. The Jindan region inside his body had also dramatically expanded, and a torrent of powerful and pristine Pure Yang energy was flowing through it.

The Icefire Jindan Smelting technique was a process that was extremely slow and extremely gentle. As the Pure Yang Jindan absorbed more and more of the icefire essence, it would constantly improve and evolve. But of course, it could be halted at any time as this was a very gentle, slow type of transformation.

The difference between a Daofather’s Jindan and a True Immortal’s Jindan was like the difference between Heaven and Earth!

A Daofather’s Jindan was on the same level as one of Pangaea’s first-tier True Immortal’s Jindan. If Ning was able to upgrade to a second-tier Jindan, he would be half a step into the Daofather level of power. After having worked on it for more than twenty days, he was actually quite close to completing the upgrade process; it could already be considered a second-tier Jindan. But of course, only after a few more days of refining would it truly reach its maximum potential.

“Let’s take a look and see how powerful this second-tier Jindan is.” Ning willed it, and he instantly vanished from the Immortal estate, appearing within Myriad Mountains Island in the world outside.

.....

Myriad Mountains Island.

The battle between the Empyrean Gods and the demons had reached a fevered state. Ning had just been knocked flying away...and suddenly, a second Ning appeared out of nowhere. The sudden appearance of a second Ning caused all of the Empyrean Gods present, as well as the many Empyrean Gods watching from far away, to gawk in amazement.

“Two Empyrean God Darknorths?!”

Chapter 21: That Sword!

When the two Ji Nings appeared in midair, the only one who wasn't surprised was the demon king. He had learned from Snowfiend long ago that Ning had two clones, and this was actually the reason why he had given Ning the 'special treatment'.

"Your clone has finally appeared." The demon king laughed loudly. "I've been waiting quite a while."

Whoosh! He charged straight towards Ning.

One of the Nings flew straight towards him with [Three Heads, Six Arms] activated. Six streaks of sword-light lashed out as this Ning engaged the demon king in close combat. As for the other Ning, the Ning who had just appeared...a total of 729 top-grade Pure Yang swords appeared around him, slowly undulating up and down. His Pure Yang energy, far more pure and powerful than the energy of the True Immortals of the Three Realms, flowed outwards through his body, filling each and every one of those Immortal swords.

Ning's energy was simply too pure. The solidified energy sword that was created by the [Greater Thousand Swords Formation] was thus improved dramatically as well. All of the energy from the many swords levitating around Ning flowed towards his chest, merging into a single jade sword that appeared before him.

"Eh?" The demon king, who had just knocked aside the other Ning, suddenly felt a feeling of shock in his heart. He turned to take a look and saw the jade sword. He immediately sensed an invisible aura of menace coming from that sword, causing him to feel stunned. "That flying sword actually makes me feel as though I'm in danger. How can this be? How can he be so powerful?"

"That flying sword..."

"The power of that sword-formation..."

The lesser demons, the demon generals, Feiyou and the rest of the

Empyrean Gods...everyone last one of them was stunned. There was no way to suppress or retract the aura of a sword-formation, and the jade sword was the crystallized essence of sword-ki itself; waves of power emanated outwards from it! This caused all of the demons and Empyrean Gods to feel a nameless fear.

Ji Ning...had already reached a qualitatively higher level of existence than they had.

“Go!” Ning pointed. Whoosh! The jade sword left behind a solitary, arcing scar in the skies. It transformed into a crescent streak, and the jade sword, covered by black sword-light, turned to strike at the demon king. All of the demons and Empyrean Gods present could sense the solitary, desolate beauty of the crescent streak...and could also sense the terror that it brought.

Ning had both fourth-stage swordforce and fourth-stage heartforce, and both gave him power comparable to the most supreme of Empyrean Gods. Ning’s [Starseizing Hand] also gave him power that was close to that of a supreme Empyrean God by itself. And prior to his Jindan evolving, when Ning used 729 top-grade Pure Yang swords in the ninth-level of the [Greater Thousand Swords Formation] formation, he similarly was capable of unleashing power that could only be matched by the most supreme of Empyrean Gods and True Immortals.

Fourth-stage swordforce, fourth-stage heartforce, the [Starseizing Hand], and the ninth level of the [Greater Thousand Swords Formation]; all of them were on the same level. Although the [Starseizing Hand] and the [Greater Thousand Swords Formation] were slightly weaker by comparison, they were still on the same general level as the other two.

But now...!

Now that Ning’s Jindan had begun to evolve, his Pure Yang energy had become tens of times purer than before. Without any question, the jade sword formed through the crystallization of this pure energy via the [Greater Thousand Swords Formation] was now tens of times more powerful than before as well! It had already surpassed the apex of power

possible Empyrean Gods; it had stepped into the Daofather level! In fact, in power and presence alone, it was a bit more powerful than Redsnow's 'Seven Planets God' or even Sword Immortal Evergreen's Daofather golem! It was comparable to Ning using the perfect Heaven Punisher!

"Fast!" The demon king's face changed dramatically.

The jade sword shot towards him at incredible speed. After Ning's energy had been upgraded and purified, his jade sword's speed had been greatly enhanced as well. The demon king hurriedly brandished his longstaff, seeking to block...but the jade sword covered by black sword-light was quite bizarre. It slashed out in a strange, ghostly manner, arcing past the longstaff and scraping through the demon king's body.

Swish.

The demon king, longstaff in hand, just stood there blankly. And then, his body began to fall apart. He had already been bisected by that sword attack.

"I lost."

The demon king's bisected body quickly reformed, but he still stared blankly at Ning. In fact, the entire battlefield turned completely silent. Those frantically attacking lesser demons and demon commanders had come to a halt as well. They all raised their heads, staring at their demon king in disbelief. They also stared at the white-robed youth who was surrounded by a countless cluster of levitating swords.

The nine Empyrean Gods raised their heads to stare at Ning as well.

"Darknorth..." They all felt stunned.

The Seven Dragon Gods and the many other Empyrean Gods off in the distance were all completely dazed as well. They were only able to watch, not fight...and they all stared at the white-robed youth.

"We lost. I lost." The demon king looked at the two Ji Nings. One of them vanished, leaving behind the other one.

The attack of the demon army could indeed be described as a calamity

or as a tribulation. To survive it, there were two options. The first was to endure for long enough and wait for the demon king to order the retreat. The second was to slay the demon king; in this case as well, the demon army would disperse.

However, during all of the previous tribulations, they had relied on the first method to succeed. They had supported each other and had managed to endure the deadly calamity with difficulty. Normally, one or two Empyrean Gods would die. This was because so long as a single one died, the demon army would slowly begin to lower the pace and power of its assaults. The creator of Undermoon Lake's goal was to temper Empyrean Gods, after all, not to wipe all of them out.

In the past, they had relied on the first method...but this time, Ning had slain the demon king!

"Empyrean God Darknorth. Ji Ning." The demon king looked at Ning. "After entering Undermoon Lake, you made it all the way here in one try... and, from what I can tell, even the countless demons under my command who guard the 'Demon Icepass' won't be able to hold you off for long. You should already have the power to make it to the fourth island. After you make it there, the only one you have to worry about is the final guardian. Your talent and your power is far superior to Jueming's; there is a very high chance that you will be able to survive and depart from Undermoon Lake."

"Work hard, young man." The demon king looked at Ning, a deep, long smile on his face. "When you reach the fifth island...you'll find a surprise in store for you."

"Children, let's go!" The demon king turned and left. The demon commanders and lesser demons all whistled through the air after him, but as they left quite a few gave Ning curious glances.

The demon army had come like a tidalwave. Now, they receded like the waves as well.

Eastvoid and Zhenbu let out sighs of relief, but they were still frightened as they thought back to what had nearly happened. The other

Empyrean Gods all landed on the ground as well.

“Darknorth.” Eastvoid walked over, a smile on his face. “Thank you. You saved my life.”

“And mine as well.” Zhenbu also grinned, then patted Ning on the shoulders.

“Admirable.”

“Darknorth, I am in complete awe of you now.”

The nine Empyrean Gods had previously viewed Ning as someone on their level, but now they were filled with the utmost of admiration towards Ning. It must be understood that Redsnow’s ‘Seven Planets God’ or Ning’s ‘Rahu God’ and ‘Heaven Punisher’ all primarily relied on the power of a formation, on the combined energy of many other Immortals and Fiendgods. Only then were they capable of getting close to the Daofather level of power.

Ever since Pangu established Heaven and Earth, there were extremely, extremely few Empyrean Gods and True Immortals who were able to reach that level of power on their own. They could be counted on one hand! Every single one was truly a favored son of the heavens. But of course, the only Empyrean God who had ever actually slain a True God or Daofather had been Houyi.

However, aside from the unequalled Houyi, Ning now stood at the absolute pinnacle amongst the countless Empyrean Gods of the Three Realms!

.....

Within the private room inside the Immortal estate. A white-robed Ning appeared out of nowhere, immediately levitating into midair to continue training in the [Icefire Jindan Smelting] technique. Slowly, the giant formation of golden light appeared below him, as did the formation of black light above him. The red-jade gourd and the green-jade gourd once more released Ninefire Lava and Iceheart Pith, and Ning once more began to slowly refine his Jindan.

His Pure Yang Jindan had yet to be upgraded to the limit.

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After this battle, Myriad Mountains Island once more became calm and tranquil. Both of Ning's bodies focused on upgrading their Pure Yang Jindans to the second tier. By the time both of them had reached their maximum potential, more than a month and a half had passed since the demon army's attack.

"I plan to head to the fourth island," Ning said. "Prior to this, the demon king spoke of the 'countless demons guarding Demon Icepass'. What's this all about?"

Upon hearing his words, the other nine Empyrean Gods all laughed.

"So you are finally heading out?"

"Given your power, Ji Ning, it is indeed true that you have a chance of traversing Demon Icepass."

"We've been waiting for you to say these words for a long time now."

All of them laughed as they spoke. Feiyou hefted his gourd of wine, then said, "On the other side of Myriad Mountains Island is yet another floating wooden bridge. This floating wooden bridge passes through an endless chasm of ice, which has countless demons hidden within it. The number of demons in that place are far more than the number you saw in the demon army that attacked. What you need to do is continuously fight your way through them, to do your best to wipe them all out. You have to fight for a hundred years. After doing so, the demon king will decide whether or not you are qualified to enter the fourth island, based on how many demons you have slain."

"Fight for a hundred years?" Ning was surprised. The last three times, he merely had to defeat the respective guardians. But this challenge, the fourth challenge, actually required him to battle for a hundred years?"

Chapter 22: I Don't Regret It

“Right.” Empyrean God Oddwitch said in his hoarse voice, “Because you need to constantly battle, there’s no way you can just use up all your divine power as you please; you need to conserve it and use it sparingly. Darknorth, when you challenge the pass, you’ll have to rely on your swordforce when you fight. Swordforce comes from the very essence of the sword itself, and so it is endless and inexhaustible.”

Ji Ning nodded. If he truly did have to fight for a century, then most of his Ki Refining techniques would be useless. This was because the amount of energy consumed by the ninth-level [Greater Thousand Swords Formation] was quite high. Although his second-tier Jindan gave him far more Pure Yang energy than he had before, far more than any ‘ordinary’ True Immortal had, it still wasn’t possible for him to inexhaustibly release jade swords. He would only be able to unleash them for half a day at most, much less a century.

To battle for extended periods of time, he would have to rely on swordforce! As for divine abilities...Ning wouldn’t even dare to use [Three Heads, Six Arms], much less the [Starseizing Hand]; that would use up divine power at far too fast a rate.

The only way Ning would be able to fight for a century would be if he was able to ensure that the amount of divine power he used up was no more than the amount he was able to naturally replenish.

“So challenging Demon Icepass means overcoming an endless swarm of lesser demons?” Ning asked.

“Almost all of them will be lesser demons,” Empyrean God Autumnwing said. “A demon commander will only spawn on occasion, and the demon king will appear once towards the end. However, when the commanders or the king appears, they will appear by themselves! The lesser demons, however, will come in an endless horde; there simply is no way you can possibly massacre them all. No matter how many you kill, more will be reformed and manifested.”

Ning nodded.

“Actually, aside from battling for a century, there’s one more method,” Eastvoid said with a laugh. “The demon king once told us that if you can fight your way all the way to the end of Demon Icepass and step onto the other island, that would of course be considered success as well.”

“Yeah, but how?”

“Right, that’s simply impossible. With so many demons attacking you, you wouldn’t be able to make it there in even a thousand years, to say nothing of a hundred.”

They all chimed in with their opinions.

Ning agreed with their opinions as well. Each of the islands was separated from the others by an enormous amount of distance. Even the Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle would have to fly for a long period of time when unimpeded. When battling countless demons, one would only be able to advance at a very slow pace. A thousand years? Not even ten thousand years would necessarily be enough.

“Ji Ning,” Feiyou said with a laugh, “Battling for a hundred years is actually quite beneficial to us. I’ve undergone more than a thousand of those hundred-year battles, but each time I didn’t kill enough to proceed... but those wild battles caused me to continuously improve and perfect my short halberd techniques. In fact, I was even able to develop my technique, ‘Wuji Births Taiji’ and merge those two types of force together. I trust when my taiji-force reaches the third stage, I’ll be able to make it past.”

Feiyou’s infiniforce had reached the fourth stage, whereas his taiji-force was only at the second stage.

“Right. It is of tremendous benefit.”

“The first hundred-year battle is particularly helpful. The later ones become less and less helpful.”

“You’ll know when you give it a try.”

After chatting with the nine for a period of time, Ning learned quite a few things about challenging Demon Icepass. After making it past the gorge, only one step would remain before he could leave.

“Darknorth.” Empyrean God Eastvoid suddenly spoke out.

“Eh?” Ning looked towards him. He could sense that Eastvoid seemed to be hesitating. “What is it?”

Eastvoid hesitated for a while, then finally said, “I very nearly died during this demon invasion. I now see the truth of things. My talent and my abilities were fairly ordinary for Empyrean Gods of the Primordial Era. Even though my time in Undermoon Lake has increased my power dramatically, I’m still at risk of dying during every single demon invasion. As for Demon Icepass, I have no hope of making it past it. My current level of power is a limit for me. Just now, the demon king himself said, and I myself believe, that you are the first person after Jueming to have an extremely high chance of making it out of this place. I want you to help me out...and take me out with you.”

“You are going to give up?” Ning was surprised. Everyone who made it to Myriad Mountains Island had been allowed to choose a treasure. But anyone who gave up would have to give up the treasure as well! And since they were indeed quite close to being able to leave, there weren’t many who were willing to give up at this point.

“I’ve seen through to the truth of things, past the allure of treasures. If Undermoon Lake wishes to retake those treasures, let it. I really want to leave. I want to see my master, my fellow disciples, my own apprentices.” A reminiscent look appeared within Eastvoid’s eyes. In the past, when he lived surrounded by all his loved ones, he didn’t realize what a pricelessly wonderful life he had. But now, after spending countless years here in Undermoon Lake, he deeply missed his master and the others.

“Darknorth...help me out.” Eastvoid looked at Ning.

“If you’ve made up your mind, Eastvoid, then I’ll naturally agree to your request. It won’t cost me anything at all,” Ning said.

“I’ll leave as well,” Empyrean God Cloudscar said. “I can understand

how Eastvoid is feeling. Like him, I've been trapped here for far too long. It's been a long, long time since I've improved in power at all. Although my agility techniques are good, my attacks are indeed fairly weak; I'm far from reaching the level of power necessary to go through Demon Icepass, much less the final guardian. Darknorth, you have a good chance of escaping this place. I'm willing to follow you."

"My dear, old brothers...all of you want to leave this place?" Feiyou was rather saddened.

"Big brother Feiyou."

"We...simply see no hope for us at all."

Of the nine Empyrean Gods present, there were actually five who were willing to follow Ning.

They were Eastvoid, Cloudscar, Oddwitch, Skyriver, and Zhenbu. They no longer saw any hope for success for themselves. Given that even the demon king had said that Ning had an extremely high chance of leaving this place, and with the jade sword attack Ning had revealed filling them with trust in him...they truly wished to follow Ning and escape this place, reuniting once more with the loved ones that they hadn't seen in so long.

But of course, the nine all felt a bit saddened as well. As they began to make their farewells, Ning suddenly fell silent.

The nine didn't notice at first, but eventually they began to realize that something was off with him.

"Darknorth, what's wrong?" Feiyou asked, "Although I am saddened by my five brothers leaving, I can understand their feelings. Why is it that you have suddenly..."

"Zhenbu." Ning suddenly spoke out.

"Eh?" Zhenbu looked towards Ning.

"I cannot take you with me," Ning said.

Zhenbu was stunned, as were the other eight Empyrean Gods present.

"What about the other four?" Zhenbu looked at Ning.

“I can take them. I can’t take you.” Ning gritted his teeth, forcing the words out.

“But why?” Zhenbu wasn’t angry, only puzzled.

“Darknorth, what the hell are you saying?” Coppersong had the worst temper of the nine, and he immediately grew angry. “When you found yourself in a dangerous situation during the demon army invasion, big brother Zhenbu risked his own life to go save you. Although you were powerful enough that it didn’t make a difference, for you to help him out costs you nothing at all!”

“Enough!” Feiyu snapped at Coppersong, then looked at Ning in a solemn manner. “Darknorth, I can sense that you have secret troubles of your own. What is it?”

Ning took a deep breath. “Alright, I’ll tell. I’m going to talk, and none of you are going to interrupt me.”

“Alright.” The nine Empyrean Gods all nodded. They could all sense that Ning was about to tell them something important.

“I’ll need to start my story from the war that destroyed the Primordial Era.” Ning began to speak, starting his tale from the Lord of All Things’ plot to have the two chaosworlds ram into each other. He continued his tale all the way to the present, where the Seamless Gate and the Nuwa Alliance had once more become locked into a life-and-death battle.

As the nine Empyrean Gods listened, their eyes bulged out so far that they very nearly popped out. On multiple occasions, they wanted to ask Ning questions, but in the end they didn’t interrupt.

“...And now, you understand.”

Ning let out a sigh. “Zhenbu battled by my side, and he was even willing to save me at the risk of his own life. I truly view him as a beloved brother of mine. But...although the Empyrean Gods of the two alliances are brothers here in Undermoon Lake, in the outside world the Nuwa Alliance and the Seamless Gate are embroiled into a war of annihilation. All of the Empyrean Gods and True Immortals, and in fact even all of the

Celestial Immortals, will be forced to make a choice; they will be forced to choose an alliance.”

“This is a war of annihilation, a war for survival.”

“Although there are many secrets involved, the workings of fate have already revealed to us that only one side can survive; either the Seamless Gate, or the Nuwa Alliance.” Ning continued, “Even the True Gods and Daofathers must pick a side. As for the Four Ancestors of the River Source, who have yet to choose...they are only able to stay on the sidelines for now. When the final Endwar comes, they’ll have to make a choice as well. The two alliances absolutely won’t allow any powers to remain on the sidelines and potentially wipe out the exhausted victor.”

“All of you are Empyrean Gods. If we were to return to the Three Realms...do you think you’ll be able to escape this war?” Ning swept the nine with his gaze.

“Zhenbu...if you were to return to the Three Realms, which side would you choose?” Ning looked at him.

Zhenbu opened and closed his mouth several times. Finally, he said in a low voice, “My master, my brothers, my friends...all of them are with the Seamless Gate. Of course I would choose the Seamless Gate.”

“Why...why does it have to be like this...why has this storm descended...” The nearby Autumnwing found this hard to believe. “Everything was perfectly peaceful...”

“None of us have ever been able to control the destiny of the Three Realms. When the war that ended the Primordial Era occurred, it wasn’t a long period of time had passed that we realized the Lord of All Things, an alien Outsider, had been the one to instigate it. There are definitely secrets behind this catastrophe as well...but they aren’t for the likes of us to understand.” Oddwitch let out a sigh.

Feiyou suddenly said in a low voice, “Darknorth, I’ll leave with you.”

“Big brother Feiyou?” Ning was shocked. “All you need to do is make a breakthrough in taiji-force and you’ll be able to make it past Demon

Icepass. In fact, you even stand a good chance of leaving Undermoon Lake on your own.”

“Now that a storm has swept the Three Realms, no one can simply act selfishly for themselves. Yes, if we hide in Undermoon Lake, we’ll be able to avoid this storm,” Feiyou said, a look of agony on his face, “But many of my fellow disciples already died during the war that ended the Primordial Era. I avoided one storm already. This time...I can’t keep hiding. I’m going to face this storm alongside my brothers and my fellow disciples.”

“I’ll go back as well.”

“And I.”

“The storm has descended. Every little bit of extra power counts.”

Of the nine Empyrean Gods, seven belonged to the Nuwa Alliance. Feiyou, Jibu, and Coppersong had been planning on staying, but now they decided to return as well.

News of the storm quickly spread throughout Myriad Mountains Island...and the Empyrean Gods who viewed each other like brothers had to make their choice.

Three days later, every single Empyrean God of the Nuwa Alliance elected to follow Ning. As for the twelve who belonged to the Seamless Gate, all of them remained on Myriad Mountains Island.

“I don’t wish to one day be forced to kill them in the outside world.” Ning stood before the floating wooden bridge. He murmured softly, “I’d rather have them stay here at Undermoon Lake and wait for this storm to pass. No matter which side wins, they wouldn’t go so far as to act ruthlessly against such a small number of survivors.”

“Let’s go.”

Although Ning felt quite miserable in his heart, he had already made his decision. He had no regrets.

He stepped onto the floating wooden bridge.

Chapter 23: A Hundred Years

Demon Icepass was unfathomably long...and with each step Ji Ning took, an unbelievable number of demons fell before him.

At every moment in time, Ning was striking out with his swords using his full power. He would only succeed if he killed enough demons within the allotted timespan. Empyrean God Feiyou had managed to battle for a hundred years, but he wasn't able to kill enough of the demons. Now that the Three Realms had been embroiled in war, it was hard to say when the Endwar would begin. Thus, Ning had to move quickly! Experiencing a hundred-year battle once was enough; he didn't want to fail and have to try a second time or a third time!

In addition, Ning didn't dare to slacken off for even an instant. Every single one of these countless demons had the power of an Empyrean God. Fortunately, they didn't use any formations, and so at any given moment Ning only had to deal with the dozens of demons closest to him.

Time slowly flowed on. In the blink of an eye, nearly a hundred years of frenzied battling had gone past.

Within a gorge that had been completely frozen solid by ice, a white-robed youth was battling frenetically with a pair of twin swords in his hands. His sword-light flickered around as fast and unpredictably as lightning.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

Sword-light flashed, and a demon was cleft in twain from the waist.

Sword-light stabbed forward, and a demon's head instantly exploded.

Sword-light curved outwards, causing three nearby demons to collapse.

"His sword-arts are becoming increasingly fast. Of all the Empyrean Gods I've witnessed since the creation of Undermoon Lake, his sword is the fastest." The demon king stood atop one of the two icy canyon walls above the gorge. He stared downwards at the thronging, ant-like horde of demons that were surrounding and attacking Ning.

This sort of battle had already gone on for a century.

“Right. When he first entered the icepass, his sword wasn’t this quick.” The Purgatory God, body wreathed in flames, spoke out. “He’s advancing almost nonstop, and his sword-arts are becoming increasingly powerful. If I were to fight him again, I would probably be effortlessly defeated.”

“His sword truly is fast. How did it become so fast? From what I can tell, it must have reached the speed of light, right?” The hideous sea yaksha spoke out as well.

“Yes, very nearly. Even if it isn’t at lightspeed, it’s not too far from it.” Snowfiend agreed.

The guardians of Undermoon Lake spent most of their time together, albeit the Purgatory God, Snowfiend, and the sea yaksha merely kept clones of themselves here at Demon Icepass. They were all quite curious about Ning, and so they naturally wanted to watch him battle through Demon Icepass.”

“His sword’s speed is very close to the limit set by the Heavenly Daos.” The demon king nodded. “My guess is that he must have learned a particularly powerful sword-art. Otherwise, there’s no way he would be able to advance in such a fashion without embarking on any wrong paths of cultivation at all. Normal Empyrean Gods, no matter how powerful they are and no matter what weapons they wield, are quite far from the limits of the Heavenly Daos.”

“Agreed.” Snowfiend, the Purgatory God, and the sea yaksha all nodded in agreement.

The [Golden Sunstreak] and the [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] had both reached the limits of the Heavenly Daos, allowing Ning to move 300,000 kilometers in an instant! Normally, even major powers were much slower than this.

However, experts were naturally capable of wielding weapons much more quickly than they moved. Generally speaking, their goal was to do their best to close in on the limits of the Heavenly Daos!

Ning's sword speed, however, had already come very close to those limits!

But of course...it was also possible to go faster than the limits of the Heavenly Daos! Those who mastered the [Five Treasures], for example, would be able to strike with their swords at a speed that was faster than the speed of light. The missing deity Houyi, as well; his arrows were the fastest in the Three Realms, capable of killing that Golden Crow 'Emperor of Monsters'.

"It's about time." The demon king nodded, then shouted loudly, "Withdraw!"

His shout echoed within the frozen gorge. All of the demons heard it, and with a series of whooshing sounds, they all withdrew in unison like the tides. They all parted in two directions, entering the frozen mountain walls.

"Eh?" Ning was a bit surprised. They withdrew?

He had been battling for a hundred years. This was the first time the demons had withdrawn, and he wasn't quite ready for it.

Whoosh. A figure flew down from the skies. It was the demon king, that golden gourd still on his waist. The demon king landed on the floating wooden bridge. He shook his head, the two enormous curved horns shaking as well.

"Demon king." Ning looked at the demon king.

"The century has concluded." The demon king rested his long black staff over his shoulders and said lazily, "You've really killed quite a few demons."

"Am I permitted to pass through Demon Icepass? Can I go to the next island?" Ning asked.

The demon king looked at Ning. Chortling, he said, "Although I really would like to play with you a bit longer...you really have killed quite a few demons. Your sword is too fast."

Ning blinked, then laughed.

His sword was fast? This entire time, he was worried that the number of demons he killed wasn't enough, and so as he fought he repeatedly told himself, 'faster, faster, faster!' The faster his sword was, the more he would be able to kill! And given that Ning was training in the [Five Treasures] sword-art, a sword-art that surpassed the limits of the Heavenly Daos, he had made numerous breakthroughs during the past century of slaughter. He had gained repeated insights, and thus he had gained a deep understanding of the extremely esoteric fourth chapter of the [Five Treasures]. As Ning learned more, his sword became faster and faster.

"You may pass through Demon Icepass and reach the fourth island; Kilostar Island," the demon king said. "But before you do so, I'll lead you to a place to choose a treasure."

Ning nodded. Upon reaching the third, fourth, and fifth islands, there would be a chance to choose a treasure.

"And those Empyrean Gods you are carrying with you; since they are going to give up, have them hand their treasures over to me," the demon king said calmly. "Empyrean Gods who give up are not qualified to obtain any treasures."

"Alright." Ning nodded. He knew this all along, and Feiyou, Oddwitch, and the others had long ago handed their treasures over to Ning, letting him hand it over on their behalf.

A day later.

Kilostar Island was also divided into two islands, a small island and a larger island. The small island was the place where the treasures were placed, while the larger island was the place where the Empyrean Gods lived.

"Go ahead. Your talent and your sword-art are both quite impressive; the only thing standing between you and freedom is the final challenge." The demon king smiled as he looked at Ning. "It's been countless years, but Jueming was the only one to leave. I hope you will become the

second.”

Ning nodded, then turned and walked onto the floating wooden bridge towards the larger island.

Just now, Ning had chosen three treasures and, thanks to his strenuous negotiating, acquired eight of each! However, these three treasures were not of much use to Ning, at least for now. For example, if Ning hadn't acquired the [Icefire Jindan Smelting] technique, he wouldn't have known how to use Iceheart Pith and Ninefire Lava. Right now, he didn't know any techniques that could make use of these three treasures.

“Kilostar Island.”

Ning walked towards the larger island, unable to hide the excitement he felt. This was already the fourth island; he was very close to reaching the exit! Once he reached the fifth island, he would be able to leave.

“Senior apprentice-sister...wait for me.” Ning felt a deep desire to be reunited with her swell up in his heart.

Ning immediately calmed himself down, then proceeded into the island. He chose a random boulder at the borders of the island, then sat down in the lotus position. He began to go through his memories and insights from the hundred years of battle. During that century, he had been constantly fighting; although he had gained some insights into the [Five Treasures], he hadn't had a chance to systematically examine these insights in depth.

It must be understood that prior to entering Demon Icepass, Ning had only trained for a total of roughly two hundred years! Prior to the war for the Grand Xia, Ning had actually been focused on establishing a foundation for himself. The Black-White College, Mount Innerheart's Tristar Crescent Abode...those places had all served to help him lay down a formation by teaching him many techniques.

The Nihilum Zone, the war for the Grand Xia, the Realmwar, roaming the Three Realms and challenging swordsmen...it was only during this period of time that he was truly improving on his foundation.

During this century, Ning had advanced at an incredible pace. Soon after entering Undermoon Lake, his swordforce had reached the fourth stage.

This time, however, he had spent a full century battling in Demon Icepass, and every single moment of that century was spent in nonstop combat. For someone like Ji Ning who was skilled in martial combat to begin with, this was a form of tempering that he had never before encountered. In truth, even the likes of Feiyou and the other Empyrean Gods who had lived for countless years all felt that Demon Icepass was tremendously beneficial to them, to say nothing of Ji Ning.

Ning closed his eyes. The [Five Treasures] sword-art constantly flickered through his mind as many different scattered insights began to join together, allowing him to understand it better and better. The [Brightmoon] sword-art was continuously improving as well.

.....

Kilostar Island.

A gray-robed man was walking alone through the island. He murmured to himself, "When shall I be able to leave this prison? Even if I give up and return those treasures, they still won't let me leave. I have to follow some other Empyrean God, but if that person dies, I'll die as well. Only if that Empyrean God succeeds will I be able to leave."

"But after all these years, Jueming remains the only one who has succeeded. And before Jueming made the attempt, who felt completely confident that he would succeed?"

"Ugh..."

"Dawn. The moon is rising." A powerful desire to leave could be seen in the gray-robed man's eyes. Suddenly, he blinked and turned to stare off into the distance. Far away, atop a boulder covered with gouges and marks, was a white-robed youth seated in the lotus position.

Chapter 24: Kilostar Island

The gray-robed figure instantly felt puzzled. "Who is he? I know all the Empyrean Gods on Kilostar Island. Hell, I know most of the Empyrean Gods of the entire Three Realms. But this white-robed youth..." Although quite puzzled, he knew that here in Undermoon Lake, there were only two possible reasons for Empyrean Gods to be here.

The first was they had fought a path through the challenges. The second was that they had followed someone who did.

"He's new. Does this mean...he just made it through Demon Icepass?" The gray-robed man felt shock in his heart. He watched as Ji Ning sat there meditatively, not daring to disturb him.

He waited for a total of twelve days.

Finally, Ning opened his eyes. All of the scattered insights he had gained over the course of a century had been unified, and his understanding of the sword had risen once more. In fact, Ning was able to vaguely sense a bit of what complete mastery of the [Five Treasures] should look like. However, he always felt as though he was a bit off, as though he was searching for flowers within a great fog. He was unable to truly understand and fully master the entire [Five Treasures].

"I'm still a bit off." Ning sighed to himself. "If I could advance a bit more and fully understand the [Five Treasures], thus gaining full mastery over a sword-art that surpasses the limits of the Heavenly Daos...I'd probably be able to leave Undermoon Lake."

The complete [Five Treasures] was something which even True Gods and Daofathers would find desirable. But alas, the price of learning this consummate sword-art was simply too high; learning it meant forgetting all insights into all other Daos. Very, very few major powers were willing to pay such a price...and few of the ones who might be willing had true talent for the Dao of the Sword.

Ning's talent for the sword, however, was indeed quite high. Lu Dongbin and Daofather Subhuti had judged him correctly when they had named

him a born Sword Immortal.

“Chunyi greets you, fellow Daoist.” The gray-robed man appeared next to him with a smile.

“Empyrean God Chunyi?” Ning laughed. “I am Darknorth. I’ve heard of your illustrious reputation long ago.”

Empyrean God Chunyi’s real name was Li Chunyi. He, too, was an Empyrean God who had risen to prominence during the era of the Three Realms. However, he eventually vanished, with no one knowing where he had gone. Ning had memorized all of the ‘missing’ Empyrean Gods like him, and in his visit to Undermoon Lake he had already seen five of the Empyrean Gods who had gone ‘missing’ from the Three Realms.

Not every Empyrean God would announce their entry into Undermoon Lake, after all.

“Empyrean God Darknorth,” Li Chunyi said, “I’ve never seen you on Kilostar Island before. Can it be that you just made it past Demon Icepass?”

“Yes.” Ning nodded.

“Admirable, admirable!” Li Chunyi’s eyes shone, and he immediately seemed much friendlier. “You need to battle for a hundred years to make it past Demon Icepass, an extremely dangerous affair, especially when that demon king assaults you alongside countless lesser demons. The slightest bit of carelessness can lead to instant death. Even if one is strong enough to survive for a hundred years, it’s still hard to gain the demon king’s approval. Kilostar Island...over the course of countless years, only a total of nine Empyrean Gods have been able to make it here on their own power, and that’s including you, Empyrean God Darknorth.”

“Just nine in total?” Ning asked, “How many of them are currently on the island?”

“Previously, there were three. With your arrival, fellow Daoist Darknoth, there are now four,” Li Chunyi said. “It’s been countless years, but only Reverend Jueming was able to leave this island. Four of them have died as

well.”

Upon saying the word ‘died’, Li Chunyi hesitated a moment, then said, “Fellow Daoist Darknorth, there’s something I should tell you. Of the four Empyrean Gods who died, three of them died when attempting to advance through the wooden bridge, as they were too weak to succeed. One, however...died here on the island itself.”

“Died on Kilostar Island?” Ning was puzzled. “Prior to this, I chatted with the demon king for a bit. I heard that the forces of Undermoon Lake won’t launch any attacks on Kilostar Island. How could someone have died?”

“...Empyrean God Greatdream was the killer,” Li Chunyi said in a low voice.

“Empyrean God Greatdream?” Ning’s eyes narrowed.

Empyrean God Greatdream. Of course Ning had heard of this person. One of the Empyrean Gods who had gone ‘missing’ but actually entered Undermoon Lake was Greatdream. The reason why Greatdream had given himself the sobriquet of ‘Greatdream’ was because he was the personal disciple of the Seamless Gate’s Godking! The Godking was extremely harsh and cruel when training disciples, and Greatdream was filled with tremendous ambitions. Upon hearing that Jueming had become a Buddha, he had made up his mind to enter Undermoon Lake.

“Right now, the ones on the island who made it here under their own power are Empyrean God Greatdream, Empyrean God Sealthroat, and Empyrean God Sin,” Li Chunyi said solemnly.

“Empyrean God Greatdream belongs to the Seamless Gate, while Empyrean Gods Sealthroat and Sin belong to our Pangu Chaosworld. Logically speaking, since the Seamless Gate has joined the Three Realms long ago, they should be peaceful to us. And indeed, after Empyrean God Greatdream entered Undermoon Lake, he’s worked to befriend all of the Empyrean Gods here. He constantly worked hard to improve himself, spending ten million years to make it to Kilostar Island.”

Li Chunyi said solemnly, “Back then, there were four who made it to

Kilostar Island on their own; Empyrean God Greatdream, Empyrean God Sealthroat, Empyrean God Sin, and Empyrean God Ninedawn. The others here had all given up and been carried here.”

“Empyrean God Greatdream continued to befriend everyone, and he became particularly friendly with Empyrean God Ninedawn. But who would’ve thought that Empyrean God Greatdream was actually such an insidious person...”

“He caught Empyrean God Ninedawn completely offguard with a sudden attack and killed him.”

Li Chunyi shook his head and sighed. “Back then, Empyrean God Ninedawn was actually the strongest of the four, and he had the best chance of making it out. But just like that, he died by the hands of a despicable, petty man like Empyrean God Greatdream. The sneak-attack caused a huge disturbance and we all immediately hastened towards the two, but we were too late...just one step too late. Both Empyrean God Sin and Empyrean God Sealthroat were utterly enraged and they sought to slay Empyrean God Greatdream, but he continually hides within his Immortal palace. In addition, a large number of Empyrean Gods are following and protecting him.”

“He actually attacked his own friend?” Ning found this unbelievable. “But why? Did Empyrean God Ninedawn do something to him?”

Ning was beginning to feel fury in his heart as well...because Empyrean God Ninedawn was actually one of the primordial humans!

The primordial humans numbered a tribe known as the ‘Dawnsun clan’ amongst their ranks. The nine most powerful Empyrean Gods of this clan were named based on age as Onedawn, Twodawn, Threedawn...all the way through Ninedawn. These were humans who had followed Suiren in his earliest campaigns, and Ning had always felt tremendous admiration for these primordial human Empyrean Gods.

Who would’ve thought that one would die to Empyrean God Greatdream of the Seamless Gate...and due to a sneak attack at that!

“Others are still willing to follow Empyrean God Greatdream despite

what he did?” Ning asked.

“His followers are all members of the Seamless Gate,” Li Chunyi said. “He publicly proclaimed that during the war that destroyed the Primordial Era, many of his beloved friends and brothers had been slain by Ninedawn, and so his heart has always been filled with endless amounts of hatred and rage. Although some of the the other members of the Seamless Gate didn’t approve of his actions, they belong to the same side, after all. When Empyrean Gods Sealthroat and Sin led their armies to attack Empyrean God Greatdream, the Empyrean Gods of the Seamless Gate still chose to stand on Greatdream’s side. They couldn’t just stand there and watch him be killed.”

Ning nodded.

“Come. Let me guide you to meet Empyrean God Sin and Empyrean God Sealthroat,” Li Chunyi said.

Soon, they arrived at a palace where many Empyrean Gods were gathered. Surrounding this palace was a number of Immortal estates as well.

“Ahaha, it’s quite lively here!”

“So many Empyrean Gods!”

“Seven Dragon Gods! You made it!”

“Elder brother Feiyou.”

More than a hundred Empyrean Gods came out to welcome Ning and his followers. Ning was accompanied by an amazing number of followers, and when Li Chunyi saw all of them emerge, he was badly shocked as well. He had guessed that Ning must’ve brought some followers with him, but he never would’ve thought that Ning would bring this many. Since everyone Ning brought was of the Nuwa Alliance, they were naturally quite welcome in this place, and in fact many of the people in the palace all knew the newcomers. Some were extremely close friends!

A long while later.

At the top of a mountain peak, three figures sat down to drink wine and chat. These three were three of the four primary Empyrean Gods of Kilostar Island...Empyrean God Darknorth, Empyrean God Sealthroat, and Empyrean God Sin.

“Those are all magic treasures the various Empyrean Gods brought with them.” Empyrean God Sealthroat was a callous-looking silver-haired youth, and he pointed at the distant Immortal estates around the palace. “That vile miscreant Greatdream’s murder of Ninedawn caused an enormous outcry throughout all of Kilostar Island. Everyone was worried about being ambushed, and so when they cultivate they will normally retreat into their own Immortal estates. Within those estates, others can’t easily enter, and so things are much safer.”

“Damn that Greatdream.” Empyrean God Sin clenched his winecup, a murderous look in his eyes.

“Darknorth, you must be careful.” Empyrean God Sin said in a low voice, “Sealthroat and I have tussled with Greatdream quite a few times in recent years, and we understand him quite well. Greatdream publicly proclaims that he killed Ninedawn out of hatred, but based on what Sealthroat and I have discovered...he’s simply an incredibly self-centered, narrowminded person. Ninedawn had the best chance of us all of leaving Undermoon Lake, which is why he befriended then murdered him.”

“He’ll kill whoever has a good chance of leaving,” Empyrean God Sealthroat said solemnly. “In fact, he even tried to kill me.”

“That’s because you are a fool.” Empyrean God Sin snickered. “He murdered Ninedawn, but you wanted to give him a second chance?”

“I just wanted to get a clear look at his true nature,” Empyrean God Sealthroat said with a sigh.

“And I imagine you did.” Empyrean God Sin snickered again.

“Darknorth, the demon king said that of those who have come after Reverend Jueming, you stand the highest chance of leaving Undermoon Lake, correct?” Empyrean God Sealthroat looked at Ning.

Ning nodded. When he had 'released' the many Empyrean Gods he had been carrying, some of them naturally began to talk about him to their old friends. Feiyou and the others had actually asked Ning for permission to talk about him, and Ning had given it as he had felt that there was nothing to hide. Thus, Feiyou and the others had naturally bragged and boasted quite a bit about Ning, allowing the other Empyrean Gods here to learn a bit more about him.

"You stand a high chance of leaving, and so it is very likely that Greatdream will act against you," Empyrean God Sealthroat said. "Although he doesn't know exactly how powerful you are yet, I imagine that he'll hear of you in time. In fact, as more time passes, he'll probably get a clear sense of how formidable you."

"You have to be wary of him. He's quite insidious and very powerful. He was very close to Ninedawn in power, and is a bit stronger than the two of us. Over the course of all these years, he's continued to improve in power. Perhaps in the future, it'll be possible for him to escape Undermoon Lake as well. You have to be on your guard against him," Empyrean God Sealthroat warned repeatedly.

"Oh?" Ning's eyes narrowed. "There's something I haven't told you yet."

"What is it?" The two both looked towards Ning.

"A storm has already descended upon the Three Realms..." Ning told the tale to the two Empyrean Gods, and upon hearing it the two became both furious and frantic.

"I knew that the Seamless Gate was a pack of untamable savages. They all deserve to die!" Empyrean God Sin roared angrily.

"Is the situation outside really so grim?" Empyrean God Sealthroat was worried as well.

Ning said calmly, "Empyrean God Greatdream has slain senior Ninedawn, and there's a chance that he might be able to escape Undermoon Lake. Once he does, he'll become a threat to our side. In the future, he might make a breakthrough to become a Daofather."

The other two nodded.

“I imagine you two also wish him dead, right?” Ning asked.

“I want him dead. Even in my dreams, I want him dead. Ninedawn was my dear brother; we battled together amongst the other primordial humans as our race rose to power. For him to die so unfairly...!” Empyrean God Sin ground his teeth. “But it’s useless. I know that you want to help us, Darknorth, but Empyrean God Greatdream is extremely cautious, and he has a large number of Empyrean Gods by his side as he hides himself within his Immortal estate. How are we supposed to kill him?”

“It’s true. Although you’ve brought a group of new Empyrean Gods, giving us an absolute advantage in numbers, they are hiding within their Immortal estate and relying on it to defend against us.” Empyrean God Sealthroat shook his head.

“How will we know if we don’t try?” Ning said calmly.

“You have an idea?” The other two grew excited. They had long ago been filled with the desire to kill the despicable Greatdream, but they didn’t have the chance.

“I’ll give it a try,” Ning said. “We can’t force things, though; we’ll have to use a softer method.”

“Darknorth, Greatdream isn’t easy to deal with. Don’t try to use a ‘soft’ method and end up losing your life to him,” Empyrean God Sin warned nervously. He was afraid that Ning would deliver himself up for slaughter.

“Don’t worry,” Ning said.

Prior to this conversation, Ning felt detestation towards Greatdream and would’ve killed him without hesitation if the opportunity came. However, he wouldn’t have gone out of his way to hunt Greatdream down! But upon hearing that Greatdream was very powerful and stood a good chance of escaping Undermoon Lake, a killing intent entered Ning’s heart. If Greatdream left and broke through to become a Daofather, he would become yet another powerful general for the Seamless Gate. Although it

wasn't guaranteed that he would become a Daofather after escaping, Ning wasn't willing to take the risk.

The people trapped within Undermoon Lake were outside the confines of the Three Realms and so couldn't sense the Heavenly Daos. Thus, their only choice was to work on other types of force, mastering the likes of taiji-force, infiniforce, thunderforce, and more.

However, upon leaving Undermoon Lake they would be able to once more sense the Heavenly Daos of the Three Realms. There truly was a good chance of breaking through to become a Daofather. Jueming, the only person to escape, had succeeded. Ning wasn't willing to see the Seamless Gate gain a new major power, a 'Daofather Greatdream'.

Chapter 25: Infiltration

Half a day later.

A white-robed youth was walking by himself atop a lonely path that was surrounded by a few flowers.

“Eh?” Suddenly, a muscular, golden-armored man appeared. The man said with a laugh, “My name is Dong’e. Who are you?” He was quite curious, as he knew all the Empyrean Gods on Kilostar Island.

“Empyrean God Dong’e?” Ji Ning laughed. “My name is Darknorth. I just arrived at Kilostar Island.”

“Just arrived? I was wondering! I know all the other Empyrean Gods on Kilostar Island.” Empyrean God Dong’e laughed loudly. “I know almost all the Empyrean Gods of the Three Realms as well, but I’ve never heard of you. It seems you must’ve broken through in the past few ten million years or so. You are here alone; did you succeed in challenging Demon Icepass?”

“Precisely.” Ning nodded.

“Come, come! Let me take you to meet Empyrean God Greatdream.” Dong’e was quite excited.

“Empyrean God Greatdream?” Ning was puzzled.

Dong’e laughed, “Greatdream is someone else who relied on his own power to overcome Demon Icepass and make it to this place. He’s quite powerful...” He continued to chat with Ning as they walked, while Ning put on a show of knowing nothing at all.

There was a black Immortal estate located halfway up a mountain. A black-robed man emerged from it, staring downwards. A second Empyrean God Dong’e appeared next to him as well. Dong’e had many different clones that were on watch in many areas in order to prevent Empyrean God Sin and Empyrean God Sealthroat from launching a sneak attack.

“What is it?” The black-robed man said with a laugh.

“Greatdream,” Empyrean God Dong’e said hurriedly, “I ran into an Empyrean God that I’ve never seen before and do not recognize. After chatting with him, I learned that he just recently became an Empyrean God in the Three Realms. He relied on his own power to pass through Demon Icepass and make it to Kilostar Island. Now, there will be four powerful Empyrean Gods on this island. Most importantly of all, this Empyrean God is a human. We can pull him over to our side...and in fact, he might be an Empyrean God of the Seamless Gate to begin with!”

“Oh?” The black-robed man nodded and said happily, “If we can gain another supporter, that would be a good thing. Bring him over here, I’ll prepare an appropriate welcome!”

“Good.” Dong’e nodded and immediately left.

The black-robed man grew pensive. Humans...the strongest race of the Three Realms. Monsters were a close second. When the Lord of All Fiends brought the many experts of the Seamless Gate back to the Three Realms, the two sides had made peace and had even joined together to become one big family. There were many experts of the Seamless Gate who roamed the Three Realms, copulating with humans and monsters and leaving behind their lineage.

This was why many humans and monsters had ‘Fiendgod blood’ in them. God blood represented the lineage of the Gods of the Pangu Chaosworld, while Fiend blood represented the mighty Fiends of the Seamless Gate.

Fiendgod blood was in the veins of many humans and monsters because of so many years of interbreeding. In truth, it was impossible for the humans of Ji Ning’s era to not have at least some of the blood of the major powers of the Seamless Gate in their veins. But of course, humans had closer blood ties to the major powers of the Pangu Chaosworld.

Given that the Three Sovereigns of Mankind were firmly on the Nuwa Alliance’s side, humans were generally members of the Nuwa Alliance as well. However, humans were incredibly numerous. With so many of them also having the blood of the Seamless Gate in their veins, most humans

didn't view the Seamless Gate with much enmity, and so many ended up being recruited into the Seamless Gate. In the Grand Xia, for example, quite a few Celestial Immortals had been drawn into their orbit.

Humans...monsters...many of both races had been recruited. This was why Dong'e thought that it was entirely possible for them to recruit Ji Ning. In fact, it was even possible that Ji Ning was already a member of the Seamless Gate!

"Hmph." A cold look flashed through the black-robed man's eyes. "I don't care if you are a member of the Seamless Gate or not. Anyone who poses a threat to me must be killed. Undermoon Lake...I'm the only person that needs to be able to survive it. As for the others? Hmph. The ideal outcome is for you all to die."

When Empyrean God Greatdream had entered Undermoon Lake, the storm had yet to begin within the Three Realms. The Seamless Gate and the Nuwa Alliance hadn't yet separated into enemy camps, and many on both sides were close to one another. Keeper Everwood, for example, was on extremely good terms with Patriarch Subhuti and Daoist Three Purities.

This was why Empyrean God Greatdream actually didn't care too much about whether or not Ning was a member of the Seamless Gate.

All he needed right now was an excuse!

When he killed Empyrean God Ninedawn, he had to come up with the excuse of 'taking revenge for his slain brothers and friends'. Otherwise, even if the Empyrean Gods of the Seamless Gate still chose to stand with him, they wouldn't put their hearts into it.

An hour later, Ning reached Greatdream.

"Very, very few Empyrean Gods can make it to Kilostar Island under their own power. Over the course of endless years, only nine of us have succeeded." Empyrean God Greatdream acted in a very friendly manner, taking Ning by the hand. "Come, come! Let's have a good chat!"

Ning laughed and nodded. As they walked together, shoulder-to-

shoulder, the other Empyrean Gods of the Seamless Gate all behaved towards Ning in a very friendly manner.

“Sit.” Empyrean God Greatdream laughed.

Ning and Greatdream sat down in the lotus position next to a main pillar on the second floor of the palace. The two had a jade table between them, covered with winecups and two canteens of Immortal wine.

“It’s been so long since any new Empyrean Gods have arrived,” Greatdream said with a sigh. “Life in Undermoon Lake is far too lonely. For a new Empyrean God to arrive is one of the happiest things in my life here.”

“I wonder how many people here on Kilostar Island made it through their own power?” Ning lifted up a winecup as he spoke.

“Before you came, three.” Greatdream laughed, “I’m one, Sin is another, and Sealthroat is the third. Those two belong to the Pangu Chaosworld, while we belong to the Seamless Gate. That’s why we generally don’t live together in the same place.”

Ning said with surprise, “Why’s that? The Pangu Chaosworld and the Seamless Chaosworld were both destroyed long ago. This is now the era of the Three Realms, and both sides are members of the Three Realms. Why must there be a need for conflict?”

“There are blood feuds, I suppose.” Greatdream shook his head. “Both sides have seen many loved ones die during the war that destroyed the Primordial Era. The hatred between us...it’s ensured that neither side has truly been able or willing to view the other as part of the same family. The experts of the Primordial Era in particular; many of them harbor hatred in their heart. The only reason there is peace is because both sides are very powerful. If one side was to weaken, the other side would soon move to destroy them.”

Ning nodded. Greatdream’s words made some sense.

“Don’t be fooled by the long peace. The number of major powers on both sides who have truly become close friends, lifelong friends, can be

counted on one hand. Only the likes of the Keeper of the Everwood is capable of becoming extremely good friends with the major powers of the Pangu Chaosworld.” Greatdream shook his head. “A gulf continues to remain amongst most of the major powers.”

“Things aren’t so bad for you. You made your breakthrough in recent years, after all. Both the Seamless Gate and the Pangu Chaosworld would view you as their progeny,” Greatdream said with a laugh.

In the eyes of the Nuwa Alliance, the denizens of the Three Realms were the progeny of the Pangu Chaosworld.

But in the eyes of the Seamless Gate, the denizens of the Three Realms were also the progeny of the Seamless Chaosworld.

Both sides felt themselves to be the masters of the Three Realms!

And in truth, neither side was wrong per sé. The Three Realms had been created, after all, when the two mighty chaosworlds had collided and clashed against each other!

“There are some grudges between myself, Sin, and Sealthroat. There’s no need for you to get mixed into it.” Greatdream chatted with Ning for quite some time.

Ning couldn’t help but secretly sigh.

No wonder...

No wonder Empyrean God Sealthroat had intentionally given Greatdream a chance to attack him, so as to authenticate Greatdream’s true nature. Greatdream truly was far too formidable; even though Ning had come to kill him, after chatting with him for so long, Ning couldn’t help but feel that he really was quite a decent person and someone worth befriending.

“He lives up to his reputation as the personal disciple of the Godking. His powers over the human heart are quite formidable,” Ning mused silently to himself.

After chatting for a long while, Greatdream suddenly let out a laugh.

“Haha, we’ve chatted for quite some time. It seems the two of us really are born friends! Still, I imagine you need some rest. Have you brought any Immortal estates with you?”

“I have.” Ning nodded.

“You can set it up within the surrounding area, then rest inside,” Greatdream said. “It’ll be safer inside.”

“Inside the Immortal estate? Are there hidden dangers within Kilostar Island?” Ning was surprised.

“Ugh. The hatred stemming from the Primordial Era...but enough of that. Enough of that. Just be careful.” Greatdream smiled, then led Ning out from the palace. Just as they reached the palace stairway...suddenly, and without any warning signs, he sent a streak of light to stab towards Ning’s waist, seeking to slay Ning by chopping him in half.

Empyrean God Greatdream no longer appeared friendly or amiable. The only thing within his eyes was an icy, murderous intent.

“Anyone capable of posing a threat to me must die!” The murderous intent he had kept suppressed in his heart exploded forth.

Screeech. When the blade slashed across Ning’s chest, it screeched as though it was scraping against a magic treasure. In fact, some sparks flew outward...but ning wasn’t harmed at all.

Ning turned his head to look at Greatdream. Ning’s eyes had turned cold as well, and his right hand transformed into a blurry streak of sword-light that chopped towards the man.

Chapter 26: Destruction

It was true that Ji Ning had made this trip with the intent of killing Empyrean God Greatdream, but in his heart he didn't have absolute faith in what Empyrean Gods Sin and Sealthroat had told him. Based on the reports he had seen prior to entering Undermoon Lake, those two were unlikely to be petty, vindictive liars, but Undermoon Lake had a way of changing people. In addition, Ning had become extremely loyal to Empyrean God Zhenbu and other Seamless Gate members on Myriad Mountains Island, and so he wouldn't act against the Empyrean Gods of the Seamless Gate in a casual manner.

This was why he gave Greatdream a chance to sneak attack him!

He wanted to see for himself exactly what type of a person Greatdream was. Perhaps ordinary Empyrean Gods wouldn't dare to allow others to sneak attack them, but Ning had the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art] protecting him; he held no fear of Greatdream at all.

And in the end...Greatdream really had launched a sneak attack!

Whooooosh. Ning used the [Starseizing Hand], using his fingers as swords and filling them fourth-stage swordforce, causing a blurry black light to appear at his fingertips. In almost the same instant that Greatdream attacked him, Ning launched a counter-attack. They were very close to each other...and this attack of Ning's was simply far too fast!

It was a sword-strike that had absolutely reached the speed of light! In addition, to save time, Ning didn't even pull out any magic treasures, instead simply striking with his sword-fingers. This was because he wanted to strike as fast as possible!

"Not good." Greatdream hurriedly tried to dodge, but the distance between them was too short, and this sword was too fast.

Slash!

A huge, gaping wound appeared on Greatdream's flank. Blood poured out of the wound, but Greatdream transformed into a bloody streak of

light and began to flee, having no desire to fight whatsoever. “This Empyrean God Darknorth...I gave him a full-power strike, but I wasn’t able to harm his body at all. What sort of protective divine ability has he trained in? Could it be the legendary [Eight-Nine Arcane Art]?”

Attempting a sneak attack against an Empyrean God practitioner of the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art]...poor bastard!

There were very few practitioners of the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art] in the Three Realms to begin with. The number of Empyrean Gods that had reached the Ninth Cycle were even fewer and could be counted on one hand...but Ning was one of them!

Whoosh. Ning’s right hand explosively increased in size to become many hundreds of meters long as he chased after Greatdream.

Greatdream’s evasion abilities, however, were quite astonishing. He managed to escape Ning’s attack. Although Ning’s sword was very fast, the rate at which his right hand could increase in size was, comparatively speaking, much slower. With a boom, Greatdream evaded Ning’s attack as Ning’s sword-fingers slashed past the pillars and walls of the palace. Instantly, a pillar collapsed, the walls shattered, and half of the entire palace began to collapse.

“What’s going on?!” A group of Seamless Gate members were outside the palace in small groups. All of them turned their heads to stare.

They saw Empyrean God Greatdream fleeing from the palace, soaked in blood. Filling his voice with divine power, he shouted out frantically, “Darknorth ambushed me! He came to kill me! Empyrean God Sin and Empyrean God Sealthroat sent him here to kill me!” He had decided to first shift the blame to Ning, then worry about the rest later.

“Ambush? Kill?”

These Empyrean Gods of the Seamless Gate all knew that their side had been tussling against the other side for quite some time now. The enemy side had always wanted to slay Greatdream, and so none of them questioned his claims now.

And in truth, technically speaking, Greatdream's words were true. Ji Ning really had come to kill him! Except...it was Greatdream who ambushed Ning first.

"Assemble the formation."

"Kill Darknorth."

Instantly, the twenty-plus Empyrean Gods began to join together into formations, joining together to form a trio of Seven Planets Gods and a single Three-Eyed Demon.

The white-robed Ning stared at the three Seven Planets Gods and the Three-Eyed Demon before him.

"Darknorth, you actually came to ambush Empyrean God Greatdream?"

"You really are seeking out your own death."

"Damn you."

They all glared at Ning.

Ning said calmly, "If I said that it was Greatdream who ambushed me, would you believe it?"

"If I ambushed you, why is it that you are completely unharmed while I am deeply injured?" One of the Seven Planets Gods roared furiously. This one had a face quite similar to that of Greatdream's. "You actually swindled your way into our ranks to ambush me. Quite bold! Everyone, attack! Wipe him out and let Sin and the others know that anyone who dares to attack us will be killed. If one comes, one will die; if ten come, ten will fall!"

Because these Empyrean Gods of the Seamless Gate stood alongside Greatdream, they had been fighting against the forces of Sin and Sealthroat for many years now. They had always been at a disadvantage due to their lower numbers and thus nursed deep grudges.

"If you were to join together and hide within the Immortal estate...I might not be able to do anything to you." Ning mentally shook his head.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

Instantly, more than seven hundred Pure Yang swords appeared around him. The pure energy from Ning's Jindan flowed into the swords, then was transformed and manifested as an incomparably sharp jade sword that appeared before him. Ning just glanced at the three Seven Planets Gods and the Three-Eyed Demon before him, and the jade sword instantly launched an attack.

"Kill."

"Kill!" The enemy forces came charging straight towards Ning.

In terms of raw power, none of the Seven Planets Gods were comparable to the one which Redsnow commanded.

As for the Three-Eyed Demon, it was the weakest of the four, and by a wide margin at that.

It must be understood that during the Crimsonbright Realmwar, Evergreen's Daofather golem had been able to suppress the Seven Planets God...but Ning's perfect Heaven Punisher had been able to suppress the Daofather golem! Now that Ning had a Pure Yang Jindan that was similar to that of a weak Daofather's, his sword was incredibly powerful when using the most terrifying stances of the [Brightmoon] sword-art. The past hundred years of battle had only caused his sword-arts to become even deadlier.

The power of this sword-strike he had just launched was actually much more powerful than that of even the perfect Heaven Punisher he once commanded.

"Die!" The Seven Planets God that Greatdream commanded let out a furious roar. He wielded a pair of enormous scimitars in his hands, and he sent them chopping downwards towards Ning.

The jade sword arced through the skies in a solitary, beautiful line.

Swish.

Although Greatdream sought to block it, the jade sword was simply too fast, and he was just a bit too slow. It must be understood that the demon king was just as fast and strong as the Seven Planets God, but even he was

unable to block Ning's jade sword. And after a century of battle, the current Ji Ning had improved tremendously compared to the Ji Ning of the past.

Slash. The jade sword slashed downwards across the body of the Seven Planets God.

"Go, go!" Ning stared coldly.

The many Immortal swords around him undulated, allowing his energy to flow through and coalesce into two more jade swords that immediately flew towards the enemy.

"How can this be?"

"Good heavens."

"How can he be this powerful?! How can an Empyrean God be this strong?!"

In almost the blink of an eye, the three Seven Planets Gods and the Three-Eyed Demon were all destroyed. The Empyrean Gods that had been within the formations were terrified. Greatdream, in particular, found this all impossible to believe; how could this person be so powerful? This was a level of power that caused him to feel despair.

"Spare us!" Greatdream called out hurriedly.

Slash! Slash! Slash!

One of the jade swords was spent, but the other two continued to fly forwards. All the Empyrean Gods they flew past were chopped apart into multiple pieces. These Empyrean Gods immediately began to heal themselves and flee in terror...but alas, they were quickly ground up into tiny slices of meat.

"Die." Ning stretched out with his two hands, which instantly swelled in size. They seemed to become two enormous black clouds that slammed towards the remnants of the Empyrean Gods.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Ning's two gigantic cloud-sized hands clapped together multiple times,

with all of the Empyrean Gods trapped within them. He clapped them into dust. Just a few claps later, their divine power was completely used up and they all perished.

More than twenty Empyrean Gods...had died, just like that!

In truth, if all of them had hidden themselves within their Immortal estate and relied on the formations of the estate to protect themselves, there would've been nothing that Ning could've done. Perhaps Ning's Rahu Formation was capable of breaching the combined defenses of more than twenty Empyrean Gods who were jointly resisting him within a formation, but Ning didn't have any other Immortals following and assisting him at present. All he had was the Pure Yang Jindan within his body, and so Ning was 'only' as strong as a perfect Heaven Punisher, with his sword-arts being more profound than before.

But they had instead chosen to exchange attacks with Ning?

That was suicide...and so they really had died.

"The person who kill you was me...Ji Ning," Ning murmured softly to himself.

At his level of heartforce, Ning knew exactly when to kill and when not to kill. He had already made the decision in his mind.

After killing Greatdream and the others, Ning only let out a sigh and shook his head. He remained as calm and collected as ever as he began to return to the others.

.....

"Eh?"

"That's Empyrean God Darknorth over there!"

"Isn't Darknorth supposed to be with Sin and the others?" Quite a few of the Empyrean Gods were confused. Ning had only informed Sin and Sealthroat of his decision to attack.

Whoosh. Whoosh.

Soon, two more figures appeared. They were Empyrean God Sin and

Empyrean God Sealthroat.

“It’s good to see you back.” The two of them both felt relieved upon seeing him.

“I told you I’d be fine,” Ning said. He had the power to defeat all of the enemy’s Empyrean Gods at the same time; of course he would’ve been fine.

“How’d it go?” Sealthroat immediately asked.

“Dead,” Ning said.

Sealthroat and Sin both revealed looks of wild joy on their faces. Sin mumbled to himself, “Wonderful. No matter what we tried, we weren’t able to do anything to him. He was simply too crafty...but now, he’s dead. Wonderful, wonderful!”

“All dead,” Ning elaborated.

“All...dead?” Sin and Sealthroat revealed looks of disbelief on their faces.

They really couldn’t believe what they had just heard. In fact, that very day the two of them paid a personal visit to the place where the Seamless Gate’s forces had gathered. They stared at the collapsed palace, at the shattered ground, at the scars of battle...but there wasn’t a single enemy Empyrean God in sight. Only then did they truly believe that Ning had done what he said he had done.

“More than twenty Empyrean Gods. All dead. How?!” Sin was filled with confusion. “There were so many of them. Most were comparatively weak, but they had the absolute advantage in raw numbers. Even if they just joined together into simple Seven Planets Gods, they would become incredibly powerful.”

“If you can’t understand it, don’t bother trying to. Darknorth had his own methods for succeeding. All we know and need to know is that he is very powerful. No wonder the demon king said that he is very likely to succeed in leaving Undermoon Lake.” Sealthroat couldn’t help but sigh and smile in amazement while praising Ning. “This is perfect. If Greatdream was the only one to die, the other Empyrean Gods of the

Seamless Gate would've posed a headache as well, forcing us to constantly be on our guard. Now, however, we have nothing to fear."

"Agreed." Sin nodded as well.

Greatdream had already become a person of the past. What Ji Ning cared about the most right now was the final challenge! He was just one step away from leaving Undermoon Lake.

The third day since his arrival on Kilostar Island.

The dawn moon had risen into the skies.

On the other side of Kilostar Island, Ning was standing with the other two, staring off into the distance.

Sin pointed towards the distance. "Look, over there! That's the Path of Blades. It is the final challenge. If you are able to walk the Path of Blades, you'll make it to the fifth island and be able to leave."

"The Path of Blades?" Ning stared at the distant wooden bridge. The wooden bridge led to a place that was filled with countless enormous knives, swords, and spears that stood upright and erect.

Chapter 27: The Final Challenge: The Path of Blades

“How strong is the guardian of this ‘Path of Blades’? Anything special to watch out for?” Ji Ning asked.

This was the final challenge. Ning understood that the guardian definitely had to be a terrifyingly strong figure.

Empyrean God Sin and Empyrean God Sealthroat exchanged a glance, then they both laughed. Sin then turned to Ning. “The foe you will encounter on the Path of Blades...is yourself!”

“Myself?” Ning was flabbergasted.

“Right.” Sin explained, “When you challenge the Path of Blades, the enemy that appears will look exactly like you and have the exact same divine body, the exact same divine abilities, the exact same Immortal energy...the exact same everything. In fact, if you use sword-arts, he’ll choose to use sword-arts as well. The only difference is...the sword-arts that he uses will be the sword-arts of Undermoon Lake.”

Ning felt shocked. His greatest advantage was that his Pure Yang Jindan had reached the second tier...but on the Path of Blades, this would give him no advantage at all!

“On the Path of Blades, you will strictly be competing in pure combat techniques,” Sealthroat explained with a sigh. “I would compete in spear-arts, while you will be competing in sword-arts! Only if your sword-arts are sufficiently profound will you be able to defeat your foes. In addition, on the Path of Blades, there will be a total of ten such opponents. All of them will have the same divine body and same abilities as you, but the sword-arts they use will be different. The later guardians will have increasingly profound sword-arts.”

“The Path of Blades...it has ten guardians that are akin to ten of you. Only by defeating these ten copies of yourself will you be able to reach the fifth island and leave Undermoon Lake,” Empyrean God Sealthroat

said.

Ning nodded slowly. Defeat himself? Ten increasingly powerful versions of himself?

He now understood how difficult it would be to traverse the Path of Blades. Ning no longer felt that confident in his ability to defeat it. The reason why he was much more powerful than the other Empyrean Gods was thanks to his Jindan and his [Eight-Nine Arcane Art], but now both advantages had been stripped for him. If this was purely a competition of sword-arts...

Fortunately, the hundred years he had spent battling in Demon Icepass had resulted in his sword-arts improving dramatically! And after reaching Kilostar Island, he had trained for another ten-plus days, resulting in him getting the vague sense that he was closing in on complete mastery of the [Five Treasures], with his sword-arts reaching the speed of light.

“What level of sword-arts will be necessary to overcome the Path of Blades?” Ning no longer felt confident.

“Brother Darknorth, you are the one who the demon king said has the highest chances of surviving and leaving Undermoon Lake. All of us will be watching you with hope,” Empyrean God Tyranodragon said with a laugh.

“If you can leave, we’ll be able to leave as well.”

“If brother Darknorth wishes to leave, it won’t prove to be too difficult a task!”

More than two hundred Empyrean Gods were here, gathered around a campfire that was currently being used to roast skinned animals. They all looked towards Ning with scorching gazes, because in their heart, this ‘Empyrean God Darknorth’ stood the highest chances of succeeding out of them all. All of them had been trapped here for far, far too long; in their innermost hearts, they deeply desired to be able to leave this place.

“Alright, alright! Don’t give Darknorth too much pressure.” Empyrean God Feiyou boomed out, “Do you really think Undermoon Lake is so easily

escaped from? Let Darknorth take things slowly.”

“Right. We won’t rush him. We’ve been waiting for so long already; another ten thousand years or even another million years is nothing.”

“I’m personally in no rush, but the outside world is in a state of chaos. The earlier we can leave, the better. If we take too long, the war might have ended already. If we go out early, at least we’ll be able to help out a bit.”

The commotion continued unabated. As for Sealthroat and Sin, the two Empyrean Gods had reached Ning’s side. Sealthroat said softly, “Darknorth, to tell you the truth, this Path of Blades...Sin and I have been challenging it for many, many years. No matter how hard I try, I’m unable to overcome the seventh opponent, while Sin has been stymied by the sixth opponent. Each of the ten guardians is more powerful than the last, and I have four more remaining before I can leave, while Sin has five! Our chances of improving are quite minute...”

“It’s true.” Sin let out a sigh as well. “I’ve only defeated half of the ten guardians; five more are left! I truly have no confidence in myself anymore. In truth, Ninedawn stood a very good chance. He had already reached the eighth guardian, with only two more to go after beating that one. But alas, he ended up dying in the hands of Greatdream. Greatdream was more formidable than the two of us as well; he had already reached the eighth of the guardians as well.”

Ning nodded. He could sense that Sin and Sealthroat no longer had enough faith in themselves.

“I don’t know how long it would take for the two of us to leave on our own.” Sealthroat looked at Ning. “These two hundred Empyrean Gods have entrusted their hopes to us, but the two of us can’t do it. It’s all up to you.”

“Darknorth, it really is up to you.” Sin looked at Ning as well.

“I can only promise to do my best. I’m not certain that I can succeed either,” Ning said.

“Oh, right...” Sealthroat advised, “Remember, if you are able to defeat the ninth guardian, immediately withdraw and come back to Kilostar Island.”

“Why?” Ning was stunned.

“Because if you can defeat all ten guardians in one go, you’ll immediately be sent towards the fifth island,” Sealthroat said hurriedly. “But what of the two hundred Empyrean Gods over here? They are all waiting for you to lead them out of this place. If you can defeat the ninth guardian, you should take them all with you when you go challenge the tenth guardian.”

“Right, right, right! It’s said that Jueming gained a sudden insight when challenging the Path of Blades, and so made it all the way past the final three guardians without giving anyone advance notice. He immediately left without being able to take a single Empyrean God with him.” Sin said angrily, “Jueming was too selfish!”

“Perhaps it wasn’t his fault,” Sealthroat said. “It’s possible that he was so excited by his sudden insight that he lost track of how many guardians he had defeated. He just continued to fight until they were all gone...and by then, there was no way back for him!”

“Hmph.” Sin just let out a contemptuous snort. Clearly, he nursed quite the grudge against Jueming.

“There’s no point in saying all these things.” Sealthroat smiled as he looked towards Ning. “Darknorth, the two of us can’t do it. It really is up to you.”

“Tomorrow, give it a good shot. But of course, don’t actually go through all ten stages at once. Hold back a little,” Sin said with a laugh.

“If I can defeat nine of the guardians, I would return and celebrate.” Ning shook his head. He didn’t feel confident.

The next day. More than two hundred Empyrean Gods ushered Ning towards the edge of Kilostar Island.

“Darknorth, be careful.”

“Come back after beating nine of them.”

“Darknorth, staying alive is what really matters. Don’t end up losing your life!”

The Empyrean Gods all gave him their various instructions and exhortations. In the past, there truly had been a number of Empyrean Gods who had died on the Path of Blades. Ning, however, wasn’t worried. The Empyrean Gods would encounter guardians that were identical to them, which meant that when they fought against their doppelgangers, a single successful blow on either side might destroy the other. Things were different for Ning.

When he faced off against a guardian, both of them would be protected by the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art]. This meant that neither of them would be capable of killing the other. This meant that the Path of Blades was actually the safest challenge of all for him. However, although it was safe, to actually defeat all ten guardians...this would be a very, very hard task.

“I’ll go now.” Ning waved at them, then stepped onto the floating wooden bridge by himself.

More than two hundred Empyrean Gods watched as Ning walked through the wooden bridge and vanished into the distant Path of Blades.

“The Three Realms have been swept into a storm. I really want to get out as soon as possible.”

“It’s all up to Darknorth.”

The Empyrean Gods all began to grow nervous. Prior to this, they had all been joking around loudly with each other, but that was just for the sake of keeping the mood relaxed. Now that Ning had actually gone forward to challenge the Path of Blades, all the Empyrean Gods felt the pressure.

If...

If Ji Ning was only capable of defeating five or six of the guardians, then it would probably be difficult for him to succeed within the next ten

million years.

“Darknorth...”

The eyes of the Empyrean Gods were filled with hope, desire, nervousness, and uneasiness.

They weren't afraid of death, but they simply couldn't stand knowing that their masters, brothers, loved ones, and family members were facing a terrible war while they were living safe lives here at Kilostar Island. They wanted to leave. They truly wanted to leave!

.....

The long wooden bridge led directly towards the Path of Blades.

The Path of Blades was filled with enormous upright swords, spears, sabres, and other edged weapons. They were planted into the ground and pointed upwards towards the heavens.

A white-robed youth suddenly came to a halt midway through the path...because in front of him had just appeared a golden-robed youth that looked just like him.

“Is that me?” Ning was slightly startled.

“I'm the first guardian. Take a look at that sword over there.” The golden-robed youth pointed towards a nearby sword that was at least thirty thousand meters tall. Phantom illusions actually began to appear on the surface of the sword, illusions of a humanoid that was executing a complete set of profound sword-arts, going from simple to profound, from start to finish.

“The sword-arts that appeared on that sword are the sword-arts that I will use.” The golden-robed youth looked at Ning. “You can view these sword-arts three times. After doing so, the sword-arts will vanish and we shall fight.”

“Oh?” Ning felt delight. This really was an unexpected surprise. He was actually being given a chance to view the opponent's sword-arts? Sin and Sealthroat hadn't told him of this. Most likely, the two had wanted to give

him a pleasant surprise. There was no point telling him in advance, after all, and letting him find out on the spot would bring a bit of joy.

Ning carefully stared at the enormous sword that had been plunged into the endless ice around them. The sword-arts appearing on the sword were continuously being displayed. Three sessions took nearly twelve full hours, at which point in time it all came to a halt.

“What a curious sword-art.” Although Ning sighed in approval, he didn’t panic in the slightest, because this first guardian’s sword-art posed no threat to him at all.

“Done?” The golden-robed youth asked.

“Yes.” Ning nodded.

“Then receive my attacks.” The golden-robed youth’s body suddenly blurred, manifesting a total of three heads and six arms. Six swords appeared in his hands as well as he pounced towards Ning.

A strange feeling was in Ning’s heart, because this sort of battle tactic was quite similar to his own, and this person looked identical to him.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! His sword-art moved at the speed of light, and it was overwhelming superior. Although Ning’s opponent had increased his power with the [Starseizing Hand], his sword was still knocked flying by Ning’s sword-light chop. However, thanks to the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art], the doppelganger’s body was completely unharmed.

“Your sword-art is far superior to mine.” The golden-robed youth landed on the wooden bridge and nodded. “I am thoroughly convinced by my defeat.”

Whoosh. The golden-robed youth disappeared into thin air.

Ning continued to advance forwards, making his way deeper into the Path of Blades. Each time he encountered a new guardian, a nearby sword would begin to display a set of sword-arts for him to view. Each time after he viewed the sword-arts, Ning would feel somewhat inspired, and he was able to further perfect his [Brightmoon] sword-art. However, his [Brightmoon] sword-art was already incredibly powerful, as it had

incorporated the essence of the [Five Treasures] within it. Sword-light that struck at light speed was incredibly formidable. The word 'fast', all by itself, could be superior to countless tricks and techniques.

Ning was able to battle all the way to the eighth guardian on his first try.

Chapter 28: The Mournful Sword

The golden-robed youth standing before Ji Ning had very gentle eyes.. He looked towards Ning in a very affectionate way, as though he was looking his most beloved lover.

“Eh?”

For some reason, Ning felt vaguely threatened as the eighth guardian stared at him. Still, he didn't say anything. Instead, he turned to look at the enormous sword that was next to him. Sword-arts had already begun to appear on its surface. As he had battled his way past the guardians, the sword-arts he had encountered had become increasingly formidable and had provided more and more insights to Ning.

In fact, Ning could sense that all of these sets of sword-arts were guiding him towards the limits of the Heavenly Daos, as if they were teaching him how to reach and surpass those limits. Although there were many types of sword-arts in the Three Realms, aside from the [Five Treasures] which had surpassed the Heavenly Daos, no sword-arts had inspired him and helped him as much as these ones had.

“The major power who created Undermoon Lake definitely had an extraordinary background. The sword-arts he has left behind have been tremendously beneficial to me, but he's also done the same for the other Empyrean Gods, some of whom use spears, staves, scimitars, and other weapons. No matter what weapon is used, the Path of Blades will produce a different, matching guardian.” Ning was stunned by the implications.

This further reinforced the truth to Ning that the primordial chaos truly was filled with all possibilities. The Three Realms was nothing more than a single little chaosworld within the infinite primordial chaos.

To sit at the bottom of a well and stare at the tiny portion of sky that was visible and believe it to be the entirety of the heavens...that would truly be a joke.

Since he was weak, he had to work hard and train hard to make himself become strong. Ning celebrated the fact that he had been able to come to

Undermoon Lake and become more powerful.

“This sword-art is quite marvelous, quite special...” As Ning watched, a look of veneration appeared in his eyes. “Lingering affection? Longing? The name of this sword-art should be the ‘Longing Sword’.”

The sword-arts were displayed on the sword three times, then vanished. Whoosh.

Two swords appeared in the hands of the golden-robed youth. He lowered his head to look at the swords, his gaze very gentle. In a soft voice, he said, “It’s time to fight.”

“Right.” Ning nodded, a pair of swords appearing in his own hands as well.

The golden-robed youth smiled slightly, a beautiful, intoxicating smile. He then transformed into a gentle breeze, and his sword-light was like a gentle breeze as well. It seemed incomparably soft and harmless, but Ning could sense a tremendous threat emanating from it.

If he hadn’t had the chance to view the complete sword-art three times from start to finish, he probably would’ve been at a huge disadvantage. However, Ning now knew this sword-art, the ‘Longing Sword’, with incomparable clarity, giving him a much better chance of dealing with it. Twin swords in his hands, he sent his own sword-light howling forth at the speed of light, using the ghostly and unpredictable ‘Shadowless’ stance to launch a frenetic series of attacks!

Sometimes, his swords would be tremendously ferocious that they would actually move a bit slower. The fact that his swords alternated being fast and slow made them even more unpredictable.

Clearly, Ning’s sword-arts were far deadlier than they had been when he had first embarked upon the Path of Blades. And indeed, Ning had reaped much from his battles against the seven previous guardians.

“Blood Drop stance.”

His sword-art suddenly transformed into the fastest attack of all, the

Blood Drop stance.

However, the enemy's sword-art was like an endless, bottomless web that completely trapped and tied down Ning's two swords.

"Longing..." Ning was gaining more and more insights into this set of sword-arts. At the beginning, he had only been able to rely on what he had seen on the giant sword. Now, upon actually fighting against a person identical to himself in all respects who used this sword-art, his insights were different. Ning gained an even better understanding of how some of the killer blows of this sword-art truly worked.

"Compared to it, my [Brightmoon] sword-art isn't fluid enough." Ning's sword-art began to change as well, becoming even more unpredictable and ephemeral.

Shadowless stance, Blood Drop stance. The two joined together into a more perfect whole, and fewer and fewer flaws appeared when he attacked and withdrew.

"Eh?" The golden-robed youth frowned. Instantly, his body blurred for a moment before he manifested three heads and six arms, beginning to assault Ning with six swords.

Ning immediately used [Three Heads, Six Arms] to engage as well.

Slash!

A streak of sword-light landed upon the golden-robed youth's neck, knocking his sword aside and forcing him back five steps before he was able to stabilize himself.

The golden-robed youth stared at Ning, then said in a low voice, "Your sword is faster than mine, but the intrinsic essence of your sword-art...it's a bit inferior to mine. You have passed my challenge, but the ninth guardian's sword has also reached the limits of the Heavenly Daos, while the essence of his sword-art is also superior to yours."

"Really? Being stronger than me is a good thing." Ning grinned.

"Be careful." The golden-robed youth disappeared into thin air.

Ning let out a sigh of relief. He had finally succeeded.

Not hesitating at all, Ning continued to advance. A short while later, he saw the ninth guardian. Upon seeing him, Ning could sense the essence of utter despair surging towards him.

“That invisible essence and aura is only growing more and more powerful.” Ning couldn’t help but sigh to himself. “I hear that at the fifth stage of swordforce, ‘Sword God’, one doesn’t even have to attack; the invisible sword-intent radiating out from you will be more than enough to force enemies to feel utter despair. The Path of Blades...not only is it guiding me towards a path that surpasses the Heavenly Daos, it’s also guiding me towards the fifth stage of swordforce.”

The eight guardian’s ‘Longing Sword’ already had a hint of that quality to it.

The ninth guardian, just by standing there, was already radiating a strong aura of despair. Clearly, he was even more formidable.

However, compared to someone who had truly reached the fifth stage of swordforce, ‘Sword God’, the ninth guardian was still far, far inferior.

He was nothing more than a guidepost! His mission was to plant a seed in Ning’s heart, a seed which perhaps would eventually take root and grow in the future.

“Look at the sword-art.” The ninth guardian said these words very calmly.

Ning smiled, then looked at the sword-arts on display upon the giant sword nearby. As he watched, his face slowly began to change. Every single stance, every single stroke...it all caught Ning’s full attention, tugging on the deepest, innermost thoughts in his heart. The more he analyzed this sword-art, the more powerfully Ning was affected by it.

“Why?”

In his past life, Ning was tormented by illness. His heart had been filled with resentment. In this life, after being reborn, his father Ji Yichuan and his mother Yuchi Snow had filled Ning’s heart with love, warming it.

“Father. Mother.”

Serpentwingn Lake. Ning was lying atop that wooden boat, floating atop the lake.

“No...”

That instant when Yu Wei had died. He had felt such despair that he himself had nearly died as well. His parents were gone. Even Yu Wei was gone.

It was thanks to his experiences that this sword-art resonated so deeply with him.

This sword-art caused Ning’s heart to be filled with a dark, dreary feeling. Deep in his heart, he was filled with the utmost of despair!

“Senior apprentice-sister isn’t dead yet.”

“Once I leave this place, I’ll be able to save her. Our family can be reunited.” Ning mumbled these words to himself.

The sword-arts had already finished their display on the sword. As for the ninth guardian, he stared at Ning in astonishment, because he could sense the intent radiating from Ning.

“What is the name of this sword-art?” Ning asked.

This was the ninth guardian he had encountered, but this was the first time that Ning had asked for the proper name of a sword-art.

“Mourning,” the ninth guardian said.

“Mourning...mourning...” Ning suddenly let out a laugh. “How appropriate. I’ve mourned in the past...but here and now, I’m filled with hope.” After finishing his words, Ning turned and walked away.

“You aren’t going to fight?” The ninth guardian called out after him in surprise.

“I’m not a match for you right now. Next time I come, I’ll defeat you.” Ning’s figure quickly disappeared into the distant wooden bridge, causing the ninth guardian to gawk in amazement. Still, he didn’t chase after

Ning, because the two of them had identical bodies and abilities; if Ning was intent on leaving, there was no way he could even catch up.

“He actually didn’t even fight.” The ninth guardian was completely puzzled. “And just by viewing the sword-art, he felt certain that he was no match for me. For him to make that claim means that he should’ve mastered more than half of that sword-art and discovered the truly formidable aspects to it. But despite all that, he shouldn’t have chosen to completely avoid fighting me...”

“Unless...there’s only one possibility! After viewing the sword-art, his heart was inspired and so he wanted to go back to calm himself down and meditate on his insights.” This was the ninth guardian’s guess.

He knew very well that given how formidable Ning’s protective divine ability was, even if Ning lost the fight he wouldn’t have been in danger of dying. This meant that the only reason Ning would refuse to fight would be if he simply didn’t want to! Why wouldn’t he want to fight? The only explanation was that he was worried that a battle would disrupt his insights!

The guardian’s guess was correct.

This set of sword-arts, the [Mourning] sword-art, had indeed resonated with Ning. In fact, after viewing it three times, Ning had learned most of it! His own heart had been filled with many new insights, and Ning was worried that if the battle became too frenzied, he would lose some of those insights. Thus, he instead decided to give up the fight.

While flying back, Ning continuously reflected on that sword-art.

This was the first set of sword-arts on the Path of Blades that had truly resonated with him. This was because the feelings and emotions the sword-art embodied were feelings that he himself had experienced. He knew those feelings very well, and so he almost instantly understood the nature and the truth of this sword-art! This was a set of sword-arts that was even more perfect than his own [Brightmoon] sword-art.

Kilostar Island. The end of the wooden bridge.

More than two hundred Empyrean Gods were standing there, craning their necks to stare at the bridge while waiting nervously.

“I wonder how many guardians Darknorth made it past.”

“If he’s able to go through nine of them in one try, or even all ten, that would be wonderful.”

“Please don’t let him be so impatient as to beat all ten. As soon as he beats nine, he needs to come back and take us all with him as he challenges the tenth. That’s the ideal.”

All the Empyrean Gods waited eagerly.

Empyrean God Sin and Empyrean God Sealthroat’s chances of succeeding were too low. Right now, their only hope was Ji Ning. All of them chatted amongst themselves about how formidable Ji Ning was and how certain he was to succeed. Right now, their greatest fear was that Ji Ning would only be able to defeat five or six guardians. If that happened, it would be a long, long time before he would be able to successfully challenge the Path of Blades.

“Look!” Suddenly, Empyrean God Roughpeak pointed towards the distance. He had been seated by himself the entire time, quietly staring off into the distance. He had been alone on the snowy island for so long that he had gotten used to being by himself. He still, however, deeply desired to leave this place and so he had been staring unblinkingly towards the bridge. As soon as Ning’s figure had appeared off in the distance, he had been the first to notice.

“He’s coming.”

“It’s Ji Ning.”

“Ji Ning’s coming back.”

All of them grew excited.

As the distant white-robed youth flew across the wooden bridge, all of the Empyrean Gods rose to their feet to welcome him.

Ning landed. Upon seeing the eager looks on the faces of the many

Empyrean Gods, he felt an enormous, invisible pressure.

“How did it go?” Empyrean God Sin asked.

“I beat eight of the guardians. For now, I’m not a match for the ninth guardian,” Ning said. He knew very well that every single guardian was capable of perfectly executing their respective sword-arts. Since the ninth guardian was able to perfectly control [Mourning], at present Ning truly wasn’t a match for him.

“You beat eight of them?”

“Two more remain?”

All of the Empyrean Gods present were dazed.

To tell the truth, deep in their hearts, the Empyrean Gods all felt at least slightly disappointed. Beating eight meant that there were still two more to go! Those final two guardians were like a pair of tigers that blocked the road; Ji Ning would probably need quite a bit of time in order to overcome them.

Although they were slightly disappointed, they were still fairly calm. In fact, they all secretly let out sighs of relief. Thank goodness that Ning was more powerful than Greatdream and Ninedawn, at least. Ning’s utter domination of the twenty-plus Empyrean Gods of the Sealless Gate had stirred all of their imaginations, causing them to fantasize a bit too much about his strength.

“You beat eight of them? Not bad, not bad. Greatdream and Ninedawn only defeated seven of them.”

“Only two left. Soon, you’ll be able to make it out.”

All of the Empyrean Gods said words of encouragement.

Ning naturally knew what all of the Empyrean Gods were hoping for. He immediately explained, “I need some time to meditate and train for a period of time. I’m going to head off now.” After speaking, he immediately transformed into a streak of light and flew away at high speed. He returned to his living region, set down his Immortal estate, then

entered it and began to meditate.

He needed time. Time to meditate and go over his insights.

A large number of ideas began to swell like a mental tidalwave. The insights he had gained on the Path had truly excited him. He didn't have any time at all to waste on chatting with those other Empyrean Gods; what he needed was to meditate and absorb all of these new ideas, nonstop!

Chapter 29: Understanding the Sword

Empyrean God Sin and Empyrean God Sealthroat walked forward shoulder-to-shoulder, staring at the beautiful Immortal estate located on the distant mountain peak.

“Darknorth was only able to defeat eight guardians this time, and the last two are even more powerful...I’m afraid that it will be many, many years before we’ll be able to leave.” Sealthroat let out a sigh. He had challenged the Path of Blades many times, and so he knew very well that although it seemed as though ‘only’ two were left, a person could easily end up spending a million or ten million years on each of the final two.

For example, Greatdream had defeated five guardians upon reaching Kilostar Island. Countless years had passed, but he was only able to defeat two more during that period of time! As for the final two guardians Ji Ning would be facing...they would be the most powerful guardians of all.

As for Sealthroat and Sin, they had been here for even longer periods of time, but the amount of improvement they were able to make was miniscule. They were only able to defeat one more guardian now compared to when they had first reached Kilostar Island.

“That’s not necessarily so.” Sin shook his head. “We’ve been on Kilostar Island for a long period of time and we’ve only improved a bit, but that’s because spent far too much time on the previous islands. Almost all of our potential was already squeezed out of us, and we’ve pretty much increased as much as we can in power. Of course we would find it very hard to improve any further! Darknorth, however, made it all the way here in one try after entering Undermoon Lake. He still has much potential left, and his potential was always much greater than ours to begin with. Don’t forget, Reverend Jueming managed to suddenly defeat the last three guardians all at once, thanks to a sudden insight.”

Sealthroat was briefly startled. He nodded. “Your words make sense. Our potential has been squeezed dry and we are almost at our limit, but

Darknorth is different.”

“Honestly, I’ve been puzzled this entire time,” Sin said with a sigh. “He was able to fight his way to Kilostar Island in one try. This sort of talent and ability...in the Three Realms, he definitely would have been one of the most supreme of Empyrean Gods. In fact, the True Gods and Daofathers should view him as being very important, as he stands a very good chance of joining their ranks. Why is it that he was willing to risk Undermoon Lake?”

“Right.” Sealthroat sighed as well. “I was also puzzled.”

Ning’s talent had been acknowledged even as far back as the Conclave of Immortal Destiny by the likes of Lu Dongbin and Subhuti.

They were both able to tell that Ning was born with tremendous talent for the Dao of the Sword! And indeed, Ning didn’t disappoint Subhuti with his rapid rise in power. He had improved at a tremendously fast rate, and the fact that he had reached the fourth stage of heartforce was an unexpected surprise to Subhuti. By now, the top-tier major powers of the Nuwa Alliance viewed Ning in the exact same way as they had viewed Lu Dongbin during the Primordial Era.

However...the difference was that Lu Dongbin had the luxury of time to slowly build up a powerful foundation, then make his breakthrough to instantly become a top-tier Daofather.

Ji Ning?

In his case, the storm had already descended, and the Empyrean Gods and True Immortals of both sides had already begun battling each other. The battles were becoming larger and larger, and once the final battles for karmic luck were concluded, the Endwar that would determine the destiny of the entire Three Realms would commence. The amount of time Ji Ning had was simply too little. This was one of the greatest regrets which Subhuti and the others had.

Despite their regrets, however, they also felt that there was a chance that Ji Ning would gain a sudden flash of insight during one of the many conflicts in this storm and perhaps break through to become a True God

or Daofather! Thus, if Ning hadn't trained in the [Taowu Eighteen Fiendgods], Subhuti would not have permitted Ji Ning to enter Undermoon Lake.

However, thanks to the dangers of Undermoon Lake, Ning had gained more and more experience, growing and improving so rapidly that he was now just a step away from complete mastery of the [Five Treasures].

"No matter what the reason is for it, Darknorth's entry into this place was a blessing for us." Sin sighed with emotion as he looked at the distant Immortal estate. "We now have a chance of leaving."

"Right. When Darknorth returned from the Path of Blades, he barely said anything to us. He immediately went into seclusion. As I see it...he probably gained quite a few insights," Sealthroat said.

"Even I reaped great gains from my first attempt at the Path of Blades, to say nothing of Darknorth."

"Right. Hopefully, he'll be able to improve enough that he can complete the Path of Blades."

"Wait and see."

The two Empyrean Gods were both filled with hope.

They truly had no faith in their ability to overcome the Path of Blades. After countless years, they remained trapped at the midway point. They were still far from being able to escape.

.....

"Brother Darknorth is in secluded meditation."

"I hope he'll be able to improve dramatically as a result."

The Seven Dragon Gods stared at the distant Immortal estate as they chatted amongst themselves.

All the Empyrean Gods on Kilostar Island were focused on that Immortal estate and the person meditating within it. These Empyrean Gods had all given up long ago; even Sin and Sealthroat, who were qualified to attempt the Path of Blades, were far from being able to

succeed.

All their hopes rested with Ning. They did not, however, dare to give Ning too much overt pressure...and so they simply hoped silently.

They dreamed of returning to the Three Realms and once more seeing those colorful, varied worlds.

They dreamed of seeing and reuniting with their loved ones.

Even though returning meant that they would be in danger of dying...

They felt no fear!

This was because there was something they feared even more than dying; living without hope. To these Empyrean Gods who had given up, life in Undermoon Lake was almost zombie-like; there was no hope at all.

.....

The beautiful Immortal estate was quite spacious inside. Ning's sword-training pavilion was many kilometers in circumference, and the pavilion was studded with many lustrous gems that gathered in the light and energy of Heaven and Earth, making it dazzling to behold.

The white-robed youth, Ji Ning, was wielding a sword in his hand and executing sword-arts with it.

Whooooosh!

His sword-light drifted forward gracefully in an ephemeral, unpredictable manner.

As a sword-art that had reached the speed of light, the sword-light created by the art was nothing more than after-images; the sword itself was in front of those blurs.

Although Ning had reached an astonishing level in his sword-arts, his power was extremely measured and reserved. Ning's sword-light scraped past a gourd of wine placed on a nearby table, missing it only by a single inch, but the gourd didn't move in the slightest.

Even an ordinary Houtian-level human who was skilled in the sword

would knock the gourd flying at such a close distance with the wind generated by his sword. But the power of Ning's sword was so reserved that it did not!

It must be understood that when Loose Immortals, Earth Immortals, and even Celestial Immortals struck out with their swords, the power of Heaven and Earth would be unleashed, causing a great disturbance. Even for Empyrean Gods and True Immortals, being able to infuse their sword with tremendous destructive power while keeping it so reserved that it wouldn't injure anything an inch beyond the target was incredibly rare!

Ji Ning, however, had succeeded! His sword-arts had clearly reached the 'grandmaster' level in the Three Realms.

Whooosh.

Sword-light howled forth, filling the area with an aura of melancholy and despair. Ning was currently using [Mourning].

As far as despair went, his greatest moment of despair was when Yu Wei had shattered the bottle of Shennong's medicine, then shattered her own soul and committed suicide! This was because the moment before she had done this, Ning had been filled with joy, delight, and hope. However, disaster had suddenly struck. Yu Wei's actions, followed by her suicide, had completely struck Ning dumb.

His parents had left. Yu Wei had then left as well. In that moment... Ning's heart had indeed been filled with utter despair.

As far as sadness and pain went...

His saddest, most agonizing moment was when he had personally consigned Yu Wei into the Infinity Hells due to his decision. That was the most painful moment of Ning's life.

Ning was a man of deep, powerful emotions. Thus, just by viewing the sword-art he was able to understand more than half of it. Upon actually using it and practicing with it, he gained many new insights and made nonstop breakthroughs, the profound secrets of the sword-arts continuously filling his mind.

Nine days after his attempt at the Path of Blades.

“Mourning...”

“Although it’s despair, it’s not utter despair,” Ning murmured to himself within the courtyard. His heartforce had reached the fourth stage, and so although he entered a mournful, saddened state whenever he executed this sword-art, he was able to immediately go back to normal upon halting in his training. There was no way he would allow a sword-art to control him and his emotions. But of course, someone whose mental will wasn’t strong enough might actually go mad if he trained too excessively in this technique.

“The aura of being mournful...it perfect this sword-art. Although in terms of profoundness, this sword-art actually is inferior to the [Five Treasures], the ‘mournful’ essence it contains seems to give it a spirit of its own that is linked to it. The sword-art and the essence aura are a perfect whole, as though they were meant to be together.” Ning quickly came to this evaluation.

The [Five Treasures] surpassed the Heavenly Daos themselves; in terms of technique, it was naturally far superior.

Although Ning was tremendously talented in the Dao of the Sword, the real reason why he was able to make his sword attack at the speed of light was because he had the mental strength to be willing to sacrifice all other insights for the [Five Treasures], making it the foundation of his techniques. Ning’s own sword-art, the [Brightmoon] sword-art, didn’t actually have a particularly powerful ‘essence’ or ‘aura’ about it, but it was still quite powerful; clearly, this was because it had surpassed the [Mourning] sword-art in many ways, in terms of skill and technique.

However, [Mourning] had its own strengths as well.

It had an essence, an intent of its own that was one with the actual techniques. In fact, the intent of the technique reinforced every single stance, giving it marvelous power. For example, it was clearly inferior to Ning’s sword-arts in terms of technique, and yet it too was capable of reaching the speed of light! In fact, in many areas it was superior!

As for intent...if the intent of this sword-art could be further strengthened, it was completely capable of gaining a true 'soul' of its own.

Ordinary humans had three types of energy within them; their 'vital energy', their 'ki', and their 'soul'. For a sword-art to merely have an 'intent' wasn't that impressive; when a sword-art gained a true 'soul', it would truly rise to a new level...the fifth level of swordforce. Upon reaching that level, even without actually drawing the sword, one would be able to cause major powers to feel despair in their hearts and perhaps even flee.

But of course, actually reaching the fifth stage of swordforce was far too difficult. In the entire Three Realms, the number of experts in either camp who had reached this level could be counted on one hand.

"The [Mourning] sword-art...I've mastered it," Ning mused to himself. "If I were to challenge the Path of Blades again, I trust I would be able to defeat the ninth guardian. But the tenth? I'm probably not strong enough yet!"

"The best solution is to merge [Mourning] and [Brightmoon] together, giving my [Brightmoon] sword-art an intent of its own as well," Ning mused to himself.

The [Brightmoon] sword-art was derived from the essence of the [Five Treasures]; even though it didn't have a will or an intent of its own, it was still on the same level as [Mourning]. Once it truly gained an intent of its own, it would vault to a completely new level.

"By then, I'll be able to effortlessly defeat the ninth guardian. As for the tenth guardian...I'll have a chance as well." Ning nodded slowly. "Then let me first perfect [Brightmoon]."

[Brightmoon] was something that Ning had created himself and had been constantly perfecting. Now that he had mastered [Mourning], he was going to infuse the intent and will of [Mourning] into [Brightmoon]. Although this was going to be difficult, it was something he would be able to do.

If [Brightmoon] was a technique which someone else had created, it

would have been impossible for Ning to do this.

This was just another example of how creating one's own sword-technique could make a huge difference.

“My heart is in mourning.”

“My will is in my sword.”

“Let them both become one.”

Ning completely understood the profound mysteries of [Mourning]. Using it as his blueprint, Ning began to infuse its intent into [Brightmoon]. Even though he encountered some problematic issues, given enough time he would be able to break through them.

After a year and three months in seclusion, Ji Ning finally walked out of his Immortal estate.

Chapter 30: Sword-Art Mastered

One year and three months. More than two hundred Empyrean Gods had been watching Ji Ning's Immortal estate during this period of time, but Ning had remained in seclusion, not emerging. None of them dared to enter and disturb him, but every day there were many Empyrean Gods who were watching his estate. To these Empyrean Gods who had lost almost all hope, Ning was the only hope remaining.

"He came out."

"Darknorth came out"

As soon as Ning emerged from his estate, other Empyrean Gods immediately noticed it.

Ning first waved his hand to collect his Immortal estate, then walked towards the group of Empyrean Gods and used his divine power to say mentally, "Fellow Empyrean Gods, there is something I would discuss with all of you." Instantly, Empyrean God Sin, Empyrean God Sealthroat, and the others all emerged from their own Immortal estates. Soon, all of the Empyrean Gods were gathered here.

"My fellow Empyrean Gods, I gained certain insights during this meditation session and improved significantly," Ning said.

Instantly, all of the two hundred-plus Empyrean Gods grew excited. In fact, some even began to softly mumble to themselves. To them...escaping this place was more important than life and death.

"I am completely confident of being able to defeat the ninth guardian. However...I can't make the same claim when it comes to the tenth guardian," Ning said. "However...I will definitely make it to the tenth guardian on this attempt through the Path of Blades. Are you all willing to join me on this trip?"

"Of course we are."

"Willing, willing!"

"Fellow Daoist Darknorth, you truly are formidable. It's only been a

year, but you've improved so dramatically."

"We're all willing."

The Empyrean Gods all hurriedly assented in unison with excitement.

Ning wasn't surprised that all the other Empyrean Gods were going to accompany him. They had chosen to give up long ago, after all! But when Sin and Sealthroat actually spoke out as well, Ning couldn't help but ask, "Sin, Sealthroat, are the two of you sure you want to follow me? You've already made it this far in Kilostar Island; you are only one step away from freedom."

"That step is simply too long a step to take." Sealthroat shook his head.

"Right. Both of us gave up long ago," Sin said with a laugh. "We couldn't even match up to Ninedawn and Greatdream, and it's been a long, long time since we've improved at all. Based on our experiences during the Primordial Era, for us not to improve at all despite the passage of so many years means that we've probably reached our limit. There's no way for us to improve any further. If we don't go with you, we will probably be trapped here forever, unable to escape."

Sealthroat nodded as well. "Darknorth, you said it yourself; nowadays, fewer and fewer people will be willing to enter Undermoon Lake, and the number that can reach Kilostar Island will be smaller still. If we don't go with you, we probably won't see another new Empyrean God here at Kilostar Island for the next trillion years."

Ning nodded, understanding their feelings. "Alright. If that's the case, then let's have everyone follow me. I don't dare to claim complete confidence, but I'll definitely work hard."

These Empyrean Gods hadn't imagined that their opportunity would come so quickly. After initially experiencing excitement and nervousness, they quickly collected their Immortal estates and allowed Ning to collect them without fighting back.

In midair. Ning stared down at Kilostar Island. Previously, it had been extremely bustling and lively, but now it was completely silent. All the

Empyrean Gods had departed.

“My [Brightmoon] has advanced by yet another level. This is the perfect time to find someone to test it against.” Ning transformed into a streak of light, flying far off towards the horizon. He soon arrived at the borders of Kilostar Island, then flew forward while following the floating wooden bridge.

He advanced forward, through the Path of Blades. He reached the place he retreated from last time, then stared at the ninth guardian who was seated in the lotus position.

“You came.” The golden-robed youth looked at Ning, his eyes filled with an aura of despair. “I’ve waited quite some time. I hope you won’t disappoint me.”

After speaking, the golden-robed youth rose to his feet, a pair of swords appearing in his hands. He said calmly, “You already had a chance to view the sword-art last time. This time, let’s just fight.”

Ning also knew that each person was only given a single chance to view each sword-art. If you failed at the Path of Blades, you would be allowed to try again, but you would never be able to view the sword-art again.

“Alright.” A pair of twin swords appeared in Ning’s hands as well.

Whoosh.

Whoosh.

The two quickly charged towards each other, and sword-light began to howl through the air. The golden-robed youth’s sword-arts were incredibly fast. Although they seemed to be filled with endless mourning and despair, they were also incredibly deadly and vicious. As for the two streaks of sword-light in Ning’s hands, they transformed into a pair of black holes that completely blocked out the golden-robed youth’s attacks. Every so often, Ning was even able to launch a counterattack or two.

“Is defense the only thing you can do?” While attacking, the golden-robed youth barked at Ning.

“First break through my defense, then talk.” Ning was very calm.

To him, the ninth guardian was merely someone he was going to gain further experience from. Ning wanted to see what the differences were between his own mastered [Mourning] and [Mourning] as wielded by the ninth guardian.

This battle went on for a full hour.

The ninth guardian revealed all of his abilities for Ning to see, and as a result Ning was able to discover a few imperfections in his own mastery of [Mourning]. When cultivating in a type of sword-arts, every person would put their own distinctive twists on it, after all.

“Time to finish it.”

Ning’s sword-light suddenly changed as he went from defending to attacking.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

Sword-light howled forth with incredible, extraordinary speed, seeming to cover the skies with its might. The ninth guardian was so startled he immediately used [Three Heads, Six Arms]. Ning, however, did the same. An infinite amount of sword-light seemed to blast forward like an inexhaustible, seamless flow of water, carrying an aura and intent of mournfulness within it. In but a single breath’s worth of time, the ninth guardian was knocked flying backwards. He fell onto the ground, rolling over several times before managing to clamber back to his feet.

“You win.” The ninth guardian grinned. “Darknorth, the only one standing between you and escape is the final guardian, the tenth guardian. Be careful.” After speaking, he vanished into thin air.

Ning grinned as well. When he used full power, his opponent had only been able to just barely hold on for a breath’s worth of time. Ning was quite satisfied with this result.

Swoosh! He advanced deeper into the Path of Blades at incredible speed!

The sky was completely dark in this part of the path. The countless

titanic spears, blades, and swords that were jutting out from the ice on each side of the wooden bridge were glowing with dim light. Without their light, it would probably be completely pitch-black here.

“How odd,” Ning mused to himself.

Soon, a black-robed youth appeared in the distance. He was seated in the lotus position, and when Ning arrived he opened his eyes to look towards Ning.

Those eyes...

They contained a deathly silence within them. They seemed to have no life within them at all, just utter despair, enough to freeze one's heart.

“View the sword-art,” the black-robed youth said calmly.

Ning turned his head to look at the sword-art which had appeared on the nearby giant sword. As with before, the entire sword-art was displayed from start to finish, from simple to complex. As Ning watched, he began to feel stunned. Even after watching three times, Ning didn't recover from his dazed state.

“Enough.” The black-robed youth rose to his feet, a pair of swords appearing in his hands.

Ning came back to his senses.

“What is this sword-art?” Ning immediately asked.

“The name of this sword-art is Seversoul!” The black-robed youth replied.

“Seversoul? Seversoul...? The name is just like the sword-art itself...it really does sever the soul.” Utter agony filled Ning's heart when he just visualized that sword-art. He knew, however, that there was no way for him to truly master this sword-art, because the essence and intent of this sword-art was the ruination of the soul that would come when one experienced true, absolute, eternal despair.

Ning, however, had no way of forcing himself to feel this sort of absolute despair! The techniques of this sword-art were also far superior

to that of the [Mourning] sword-art; in fact, it was no weaker than Ning's own [Brightmoon] sword-art. It was only surpassed by the [Five Treasures] sword-art itself."

"Come," the black-robed youth said calmly.

Ning nodded, swords appearing in his hands as well.

Swish! Swish!

Their two figures became blurred as they started to fight.

Two mighty sword-arts. One was filled with the intent of mourning, its sword-light flowing out in a consecutive stream. It had been created by distilling the essence of [Five Treasures], [Mourning], and many other techniques.

The other was filled with the essence of a ruined soul and utter despair. Its profoundness and marvelousness came from the creator of Undermoon Lake, who had intended it. Although it was different from the [Five Treasures], it was also quite shocking and brilliant.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The two continuously battled, advancing and retreating.

They actually fought to a complete standstill. Both sword-arts had their own strengths; both could be described as having reached the apex of skill possible for the fourth stage of swordforce. If their swords moved any faster, they would have surpassed the limits of the Heavenly Daos. If the intent of their swords was any deeper and stronger, they would have reached the Sword God stage.

"So the sword can actually be used in a way like this." Ning had viewed this sword-art three times prior to this. Upon seeing how the tenth guardian actually wielded this sword-art, he instantly gained a much deeper understanding of some of its mysteries. New insights regarding the [Seversoul] sword-art began to fill his mind.

There was an intrinsic difference between Ning and the tenth guardian.

The tenth guardian was only capable of unleashing this single sword-

art.

Ning, however, was capable of learning from the tenth guardian and fusing what he learned into his own [Brightmoon] sword-art. Although the learning process resulted in him occasionally being put at a disadvantage, Ning's overall level of power was slowly, steadily beginning to rise. His sword-art became even more unpredictable and ephemeral, and it became faster and more powerful as well.

The battle continued for a day...two days...three days...

Neither side used any divine abilities. They were solely competing in sword-arts.

The insights Ning had gained into this sword-art were merging together nonstop in his mind, then inspiring him further. This sort of feeling, the feeling of nonstop improvement, was quite intoxicating...but he had still essentially reached the limit possible for him at his current level of sword-arts. Any improvements he was now able to make would be minute. He would at most be able to put the tenth guardian at a disadvantage, but the tenth guardian would still be able to launch occasional counterattacks as well.

"Eh?"

Ning was suddenly stunned, and his sword-light turned sluggish for a moment.

Boom! A streak of sword-light crashed against his body, knocking him flying.

"Why did you stop?" The tenth guardian stood there, a frown on his face. Ning's sword-art was clearly on a slightly higher level than his. If they continued to fight without Ning making any improvements at all, he would've permitted Ning to go into the fifth island. However, he could sense that Ning was still slowly improving, and his sword-arts were slowly transforming. Thus, he didn't stop the fight and instead continued to battle against Ning.

This was because the purpose of Path of Blades was to temper and train

Empyrean Gods. If Ji Ning was still improving, then of course the guardian wasn't going to halt.

But Ning had suddenly come to a halt...this puzzled the tenth guardian.

Ning stood there atop the wooden bridge, a dazed look in his eyes. In his mind, however...there was a disturbance that felt like Pangu cleaving apart Heaven and Earth.

BOOM!!!!

The [Seversoul] sword-art worked in a way that was completely different from the [Five Treasures] sword-art. Ning's [Brightmoon] was derived from the essence of the [Five Treasures], and so as Ning gained more and more insight into [Seversoul] and began to fuse it with the essence of the [Five Treasures] within [Brightmoon]...with a boom, he suddenly understood. He blew through the last bottleneck preventing him from mastering the [Five Treasures].

Prior to this, it was as though a thin curtain of mist had been preventing him from seeing the final parts of it clearly. But now...Ning broke straight through that final barrier.

Boom.....

"The [Five Treasures]..." Ning shut his eyes, the many profound mysteries within his mind rapidly beginning to join together. All of the insights he had gained into the [Five Treasures] were merging into a perfect whole at high speed.

He had mastered the entire [Five Treasures]!

There was no doubt about it, no questions left in his mind.

"So this...this is what it means to surpass the Heavenly Daos." Ning opened his eyes to stare at the dark skies surrounding him. He lightly flicked out with a finger, and it seemed to create a ripple as though it had touched something.

Chapter 31: The Fifth Island

In the past, Ji Ning always believed the Heavenly Daos to be the rules by which the Three Realms operated. To surpass the Heavenly Daos would therefore mean breaking through of the control and functioning of the Three Realms!

But now, upon making the actual breakthrough and fully comprehending the [Five Treasures], Ning truly understand what it really meant to surpass the limits of the Heavenly Daos.

The Heavenly Daos...

They weren't just the Heavenly Daos of the Three Realms. They were the Heavenly Daos that existed in all places!

The Pangu Chaosworld and the Seamless Chaosworld all had Heavenly Daos that belonged to them. Every single chaosworld had Heavenly Daos that differed from each other! Even within the endless primordial chaos itself, the Heavenly Dao of Primordial Chaos was omnipresent, including places such as Undermoon Lake, Prisonworld 17, or the Void.

An invisible layer of laws permeated and covered the primordial chaos and everything within it.

These laws laid out many restrictions; for example, the fastest speed possible was the speed of light! Time could only go forward, not backwards! The so-called 'temporal inveresion' spell was nothing more than a way to view the past; it didn't actually cause time itself to reverse! There were also restrictions on how powerful thunder, fire, wind, water, and other things could be.

These were laws. They were shackles that had been placed on every single creature and being. It was thanks to these shackles that the various chaosworlds could function in a stable, coherent manner. Without them, the likes of the Pangu Chaosworld and the Seamless Chaosworld may well have exploded and been destroyed long before colliding into each other.

But of course...

There were countless living creatures in the universe, and some of the most dazzling figures were capable of shattering these shackles and reaching a higher level.

Now...Ji Ning's sword had broken through the shackle on speed.

"Invisible laws. Invisible shackles. They exist everywhere." When Ning flicked out with his finger, it actually moved faster than the speed of light, resulting in an interaction with those invisible shackles of law. If he hadn't truly broken through, he wouldn't even be able to sense those shackles at all.

"Even the major powers are under the control of the Heavenly Daos of the Three Realms. Only people like Mother Nuwa have truly ascended beyond the Heavenly Daos." Ning sighed to himself.

Chaos Immortals and World Gods had all used raw, overwhelming power to burst through those shackles and ascend to a new level.

Ning was very far from that level for now; he was only able to transcend in terms of the speed of his sword.

"In terms of sword speed...I stand at the pinnacle of the entire Three Realms!" Ning mused to himself, "And in sword-arts...I should be ranked amongst the top three."

Who was the number one Sword Immortal of the Three Realms?

This was a matter that had always been under contention.

Daofather Fujun had been publicly acknowledged by everyone in the Three Realms as the number one Sword Immortal, but he had died. Right now, many venerated Daofather Holyflame. Daofather Holyflame was actually just like Ning; he had only reached the fourth stage of swordforce, but had mastered the [Five Treasures]!

There were still a few other major powers in the Three Realms who had reached the fifth stage of swordforce. However, although fifth-stage swordforce was capable of unleashing astonishing power and dazzling

skill, it was still constrained in speed by the Heavenly Daos to be merely as fast as the speed of light.

If the difference in speed was too great, all the technique in the world would be useless.

Daofather Holyflame clearly had 'just' fourth-stage swordforce, but there were still many experts who believed him to be the number one Sword Immortal of the Three Realms. It was simply that there were some who would still dispute it. As for the likes of incredibly powerful figures such as Swordfather Darklight of the Three Realms, they had reached the fifth level of swordforce, but none would say that he was the number one Sword Immortal of the Three Realms.

The essence of the sword lay in the word 'speed', after all.

Take the simplest possible motion; a direct stab. If it was launched faster than the speed of light, its power would become ridiculously great. Enemies would find it hard to even block such attack. Speed was where the true essence of the sword lay!

Lu Dongbin had felt that Ning was a born Sword Immortal, while Patriarch Subhuti viewed Ning with tremendous favor, but neither of the two would have ever imagined that in just three hundred short years, Ning's sword-arts would rise to such a level.

The reason why Ning could advance so rapidly was primarily due to the tempering effect of being within Undermoon Lake. Ning's other clones in the Three Realms were also working on the [Five Treasures], but they were incredibly far off from being able to master it! Clearly, this special environment and these life-and-death challenges brought results that were completely different from one quietly training on one's own. In the Three Realms, there were no sword-arts like [Mourning] or [Seversoul] to help guide the way.

"If I can reach the fifth stage of swordforce, I would become the undisputed number one Sword Immortal of the Three Realms." Ning's heart was filled with excitement, but he also knew that reaching the fifth stage of swordforce would probably not be much easier than reaching the

fifth stage of heartforce.

The tenth guardian stared at Ji Ning making a gesture with his finger. His face couldn't help but change as he murmured softly to himself, "... Surpassed the limits of the Heavenly Daos?"

"Sorry to keep you waiting." Ning smiled as he walked over. He was in an excellent mood.

He had increased in power dramatically, which meant that he would be able to better steer his own destiny within this great storm. In addition, he would be bringing out more than two hundred Empyrean Gods with him, and Ning knew exactly how badly they all wanted to leave this place.

"Let's see how powerful you've become." With a swoosh, the tenth guardian transformed into a streak of light and attacked Ning.

Ning continued to amble forward slowly, seeming to feel that he had matters under perfect control. No matter how marvelous his foe's sword-art was, its speed was still constrained by the Heavenly Daos. When the enemy's streak of sword-light closed in on him, Ning simply reached out with his right sword, sending it forward in a viperous strike. This was an extremely simple but incredibly fast stab.

[Brightmoon] sword-art, Blood Drop stance!

The tenth guardian attempted to block, but Ning's sword-light still managed to scrape past the defending sword and stab the tenth guardian's forehead. The tenth guardian's head was pushed backwards as he was knocked into the air before stabilizing himself and once more landing on the ground. A very complicated look was on the tenth guardian's face, and he mumbled to himself, "He surpassed the limits. He has indeed surpassed the limits. A sword as fast as this...how are you supposed to block it? There's no way to block it at all."

Once one's swordforce reached the fifth stage, one's sword-arts would also become incredibly marvelous...and yet, compared to fourth-stage swordforce combined with the [Five Treasures], it was still inferior.

This was due to a single word: Speed!

This word was enough to cause countless experts to feel despair, enough to cause even major powers to be willing to abandon all their other Daos to train in the [Five Treasures].

“You’ve won.” The tenth guardian looked at Ning, a hint of anticipation in his dead eyes. “This sword-art...is it the [Five Treasures] of your Three Realms?”

“You’ve heard of the [Five Treasures] as well?” Ning was surprised.

“Those Empyrean Gods in Undermoon Lake often spoke of it.” The tenth guardian looked at Ning.

“Yes, it’s the [Five Treasures].” Ning nodded.

The tenth guardian had a very complicated look on his face. Sighing, he said, “I guard the Path of Blades and am a master of many sword-arts, spear-arts, saber-arts, and other combat arts. But not one of them has surpassed the limits of the Heavenly Daos. To lose to you...I willingly acknowledge my defeat.”

“You are the guardian for all of the weapons?” Ning was surprised.

“Of course. The other nine guardians you encountered were actually all me as well.” The tenth guardian laughed. “However, each time I’ll only use a single type of sword-art. Enough...you’ve won. You can now go to the fifth island. Once you go there, you’ll be allowed to leave Undermoon Lake.”

“Go.” The tenth guardian smiled, then disappeared without a trace.

The surrounding darkness vanished as well, allowing the bright moon to once more appear in the skies.

As for Ning, he transformed into a streak of light and advanced forward.

After flying for roughly an hour, he was vaguely able to make out an enormous, beautiful island up ahead. This island was studded with miniature lakes that were dazzling to behold. Some of the lakes seemed to be formed from flames, some were filled with golden light, some were filled with red light, and some were jade-green.

All sorts of lights sparkled and flashed, making it truly look like an Immortal realm.

At the end of the wooden bridge stood a gray-robed, silver-haired man who was smiling at Ning.

“Eh?” Upon seeing the distant silver-haired man, Ning was quite puzzled. “He...doesn’t seem to be a living creature.”

“This is the final lake in Undermoon Lake, ‘Moonfall’.” The silver-haired man smiled as he looked at Ning. “Empyrean God Darknorth, you are the second Empyrean God to overcome the Path of Blades and reach this location...and your power is even greater than Jueming’s was. But enough of that...come, follow me. I’ll take you to the treasures. This will be the last place where you can choose a treasure.”

Ning nodded. He was allowed to choose three items from each of the final three islands.

Just a short while later, he finished making his choice.

Ning had already searched the memories of the prisoners of Pangaea, and he knew the value of the treasures before him. He knew which treasures the major powers of the Three Realms would drool over. Ning had no need of them, but he would be able to give them to allied major powers.

“Hand over the treasures of Empyrean Gods Sin and Sealthroat,” the silver-haired man said.

“Here, take.” Ning had already prepared them. He handed them over, then said in a puzzled manner, “Is there no need to hand over the treasures of Empyrean Gods Greatdream and Ninedawn?”

Greatdream had killed Ninedawn, while Ning himself had killed Greatdream. All the treasures were thus in his hands.

“The treasures of those you killed belong to you, of course.” The silver-haired man continued, “Follow me to a place. Afterwards, you’ll be able to leave Undermoon Lake.”

Chapter 32: Lifeblood Oath

Ji Ning secretly sighed to himself. So the items of those he killed belonged to him? Clearly, Undermoon Lake didn't forbid internecine warfare. Perhaps this sort of internal struggle was an even more grueling and cruel form of tempering for the survivors. In truth, the sea yaksha alone had slain thousands of Empyrean Gods. From this, one could tell that Undermoon Lake's process of selection was innately brutal to begin with.

Ning followed the silver-haired man forward through the fifth island, Moonfall Island.

Moonfall Island emanated an aura of shockingly great age.

The other four islands were all quite ordinary, but Ning had the sense that this island was different. It seemed as though this island contained an inconceivable type of power within it that was easily capable of obliterating him.

"The major power who created Undermoon Lake...he went through tremendous effort to select and train Empyrean Gods. Why?" Ning mused to himself, "Does he merely want to temper us, then release us? Not very likely. There has to be an important reason behind it all. Mmm...let me go to the final area first. I'll be able to leave afterwards, which means that this final area will make everything clear."

Moments later, Ning and the silver-haired man winded their way through a mountain path, arriving at the mountain peak. At the very top of this peak was a palace that was built from seemingly ordinary-looking rocks.

"This is Moonfall Shrine." The silver-haired man pointed towards the shrine before them. It looked ordinary; in fact, it looked rather old, ragged, and in bad shape. However, despite its seemingly poor condition, it was actually the heart of the entire Moonfall Island.

In front of the shrine, there was a stone tablet that shone with golden light.

“Move all of the Empyrean Gods you brought with you to this place,” the silver-haired man instructed.

“Alright.” Ning nodded, then willed it. Instantly, a large group of figures appeared around him. It was the two hundred-plus Empyrean Gods. Sin, Sealthroat, the Seven Dragon Gods, and the rest all stared curiously around them. Quite a few of them revealed looks of surprise and joy.

“This isn’t Kilostar Island.”

“This is a new island.”

“This has to be the fifth island. We are going to leave! We’ll be able to leave!”

The Empyrean Gods instantly grew excited. They also noticed Darknorth and the silver-haired man.

“Darknorth, this is the fifth island, right?” One of the Empyrean Gods called out to him, and the others all looked towards him as well.

Ning smiled and nodded. “This is the fifth island, Moonfall Island.”

“Hahaha!”

“Darknorth, in the future, if there’s anything you need, just say the word. Even if it costs me my life, I won’t shy back!”

“Darknorth, some thanks cannot be expressed with words.”

The Empyrean Gods were all quite excited. Some of them were actually crying. To them, it was as though Ning had given them a second life. All of them were Empyrean Gods...they would naturally remember the debts they owed others. If Ning asked them to help in the future and they refused, it would negatively impact their Dao-hearts. Only a small number of truly demonic, fiendish figures were capable of ignoring the debts they owed others without having their Dao-hearts being affected at all.

“Enough,” the silver-haired man said calmly.

Rumble...

A surge of invisible power swept out from the shrine. It was like an invisible palm that slapped down upon the bodies of the Empyrean Gods. All of them were flattened into the ground, with only Ning being unaffected.

Ning stared at this scene, stupefied. The Empyrean Gods were completely scared senseless as well. This was too terrifying! There were more than two hundred of them, but they had been smacked into the ground without being able to resist at all...and this was not simply a forceful strike of raw power.

If it was a forceful strike of raw power, the Empyrean Gods would have been drilled into the ground like nails, leaving behind deep holes. But instead, all of them were knocked prone, face-down into the ground. Clearly, in that moment, they were as weak as mortals against this sort of power.

"The major power who created Undermoon Lake truly was formidable. His abilities are beyond what I can imagine," Ning mused to himself.

"The only reason you are able to leave is because you followed Darknorth," the silver-haired man said calmly. "Now...each of you shall go one-by-one and place your palms atop the golden stone tablet."

"Yes." "Yes." "Yes..."

Moments ago, the Empyrean Gods had all been extremely excited. But now, they were all incredibly nervous and cautious, not daring to act rashly for fear of losing their lives.

Empyrean God Sin was at the very front, and so he was the first to step forward and press his hand against the golden stone tablet. In the instant that he did so, his body completely froze and became unmoving. This sight caused all the Empyrean Gods to grow nervous. Ning, upon seeing this, became nervous as well...but worrying was of no use. The aura emitting from the shrine alone was enough to effortlessly murder him.

The silver-haired man gave Ning a glance. He could sense Ning's worry, and so he said calmly, "Don't worry. He's fine."

After roughly ten breaths worth of time, Sin finally regained consciousness. He retracted his palm, a look of disbelief flashing over his face as he stared at the golden stone tablet.

“Beat it!” The silver-haired man snapped.

Sin finally came back to his senses and hurriedly stepped back.

“Next!” The silver-haired man instructed.

Although the other Empyrean Gods were quite uneasy, they had no choice but to go forward. Sin said to them, “It’s fine. There’s no danger.” Only then did the Empyrean Gods feel slightly less nervous.

Every single Empyrean God went forward in turn, pressing their hands on the stone tablet. Each of them froze for ten seconds before regaining consciousness.

After a long period of time passed, all of the Empyrean Gods finished touching the golden stone tablet.

“Put them all away.” The silver-haired man looked towards Ning. Upon hearing his words, Sin and the others let out sighs of relief. Ning waved his hand, once more drawing the Empyrean Gods into his Immortal estate.

“Darknorth, you go as well. Place your hand atop the tablet,” the silver-haired man said.

Ning walked forward, gently resting his hand against the golden stone tablet.

BOOM!

A surge of invisible power filled his mind and his soul.

“I swear on my very life itself...” No longer under his control, Ning’s soul began to swear an oath on its own. However, Ning remained fully aware of what was happening.

This...this was a lifeblood oath!

Life oaths were very complicated. Not just anyone could simply speak a

life oath. For example, in the Three Realms, there were no major powers who could force themselves to swear lifeblood oaths! Generally speaking, only Chaos Immortals and World Gods would perhaps be capable of voluntarily making themselves swear lifeblood oaths. Aside from them, all others would need to rely on special objects.

In the chaos-kingdom of Pangaea, the largest clans and sects would generally have a treasure similar to this golden stone tablet, which would be used to force the sect disciples to involuntarily swear lifeblood oaths.

Once a lifeblood oath was sworn, there would be no way for the oath-swearer to divulge any secrets that he was sworn to secrecy about.

For example, when Ning tried to soulscour some of them, he discovered that some of their thought-bubbles with divine abilities and techniques within them were covered by countless complicated runes. There was simply no way to see inside those memories.

There was no way to violate a lifeblood oath whatsoever!

Ning came back to his senses, then stared at the golden stone tablet. He said softly, "No wonder Buddha Jueming only gave a bit of information regarding some of the treasures, but was completely silent regarding Undermoon Lake. So it was due to this lifeblood oath."

Lifeblood oaths could be used to strictly restrict any and all information from being spread about something.

As for items like Iceheart Leafs, they weren't unique to Undermoon Lake. They existed in the outside world as well, which was why it was permitted to discuss them.

"After you leave, you won't be able to discuss most things pertaining to Undermoon Lake, but you will be permitted to recommend that more Empyrean Gods enter," the silver-haired man said.

"More enter?" Ning secretly shook his head. Impossible. The chances of surviving Undermoon Lake were far too low. This sort of 'training' and 'tempering' was utterly terrifying, despite its effectiveness. Ning had indeed made it out alive, but he didn't feel confident that others would be

able to similarly survive it. In addition, the Three Realms were facing a major calamity; hundreds of Empyrean Gods and True Immortals, when joined together into a formation, were as strong as a Daofather! At a time like this, there was no way he would possibly work to convince more Empyrean Gods to enter this place.

“Alright. Enter the shrine,” the silver-haired man said with a smile. “After you leave it, I’ll deliver you away from Undermoon Lake.”

“Alright.” Ning immediately walked towards it.

The shrine was ancient and tattered, but the aura of power it had emanated earlier had made Ning understand that it wasn’t as simple as it looked.

He stepped through the doorway.

“Eh?” Upon entering, Ning swept the place with his gaze. This shrine truly was too simple and plain. It was completely empty, with almost nothing inside it. There were stone pillars and stone walls, but no decorations or furnishings of any kind. The shrine was just a few hundred meters long, and he was able to see every corner of it clearly.

Rumble...

Suddenly, a blurry, deep azure light emerged from every part of the shrine. Every single rock emanated this aura of deep azure light, and the countless rays of light swirled around Ning’s body. Soon, a ‘cocoon’ of deep azure light had appeared within the shrine.

The silver-haired man watched quietly from outside. A hint of a smile appeared on his face as he murmured softly to himself, “I hope you won’t disappoint Master.”

Chapter 33: Transmission

Wrapped within that cocoon of deep azure light, Ji Ning shut his eyes. It was as though he was asleep. A surge of enormous power was currently being transmitted straight into his soul.

“I swear on my very life itself that within a thousand years of becoming an Elder God, I must leave the Three Realms. I must reach ‘Vastheaven Palace’ within a chaos cycle and inform a Welcomer of Vastheaven Palace that World God Northrest was slain by the three Wujiao Godbeasts.” Ning’s soul was no longer his control as he was forced to swear yet another lifeblood oath.

This caused Ning to feel quite irritated. This sort of sensation, of being forced to swear a lifeblood oath, was extremely unpleasant.

However, Ning instantly realized the real purpose behind the creation of Undermoon Lake.

“World God?” Ning mused to himself, “The creator of Undermoon Lake was actually a World God. However...he seems to have died.”

“This lifeblood oath isn’t that bad. I have to leave within a thousand years of becoming an Elder God, but I’m a long way off from that level. And I have a full chaos cycle to reach Vastheaven Palace. However... where exactly is it? What type of a place is it?” Ning was quite puzzled.

Although he had soulscoured the memories of the prisoners inside Prisonworld 17, he had never before heard of this ‘Vastheaven Palace’.

However, judging from the lifeblood oath he had just been forced to swear, World God Northrest had to be a member of Vastheaven Palace! He was killed but wanted to find someone to send a message, which meant that Vastheaven Palace should be powerful enough to take revenge for him! But of course, this was just logical reasoning; it was also possible that other stories were hidden within this seemingly-simple message.

Boom!

Just as Ning was pondering this question, an enormous amount of

information began to flood into Ning's soul. Ning was instantly sent into a half-dazed state, as the enormous flood of information made it almost impossible for him to think.

After six full hours, Ning finally regained his consciousness.

Whoosh.

Ning, still within that tattered-looking shrine, finally regained his freedom and mobility. The cocoon of azure light that had wrapped around him had completely vanished. Ning just stood there blankly, not moving at all.

"First the stick, then the carrot?" Ning muttered to himself.

He had first been forced to swear a lifeblood oath, but then he was given the real reward. Two major techniques now existed within Ning's memories.

The first was a Fiendgod Body Refining technique, [Forlorn World God]. The second was a divine ability, [Nine Elements Annihilation]. Both were for Fiendgod Body Refiners to train in.

In truth, the creator of Undermoon Lake, World God Northrest, was himself a Fiendgod Body Refiner. This naturally meant that he was more skilled in this respect, which was why he only permitted Empyrean Gods to enter this place. Empyrean Gods were more moldable; those who had relied on other techniques to become True Gods would be much less moldable.

[Forlorn World God] was a technique that was unfathomably superior to the [Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens]. It was an extremely detailed and exquisite technique that could guide someone all the way to becoming a World God!

But of course, just having the technique wasn't enough; actually training in it was the key part. For example, even though Ning had the [Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens], he had yet to break through to become a True God. But no matter what...this unfathomably profound Fiendgod Body Refining technique pointed out with tremendous

clarity a path for Ning to walk. There was simply an enormous difference between a profound technique and a simple technique.

For example, a person who perhaps only had a 1% chance of becoming a True God when training in the [Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens] might have a 10% chance of reaching that level when training in [Forlorn World God].

“Empyrean God. True God. Elder God. World God.” Ning was filled with eagerness.

As for the other technique, it was a divine ability. [Nine Elements Annihilation].

This was an extremely old divine ability that was spread throughout the primordial chaos. Meant for Fiendgods to train in, one could say that it’s power was quite ordinary...but one could also say that its power was almost limitless!

The reason for this was because the [Nine Elements Annihilation] involved a total of nine fundamental, basic elemental runes.

These elemental runes were very simple, like the basic strokes in Chinese characters; a dot, a slash, a vertical line, etc. But those simple strokes could come together to form the words for a word, the words could come together to form a language, and the language could give birth to profound idioms, poems, songs, and novels.

The same was true for this divine ability, the [Nine Elements Annihilation].

These nine elemental runes could join together in countless ways, forming increasingly complicated and increasingly perfect divine tattoos!

For example, the foundation of the [Starseizing Hand] was its Starseizing Tattoos. As for these nine elemental runes, their potential for growth was nearly limitless, as they could be joined together in increasingly complicated, profound, and powerful divine tattoos, which would be used to unleash divine power to execute divine abilities. Theoretically, the power of these runes could allow this divine ability to

surpass the [Starseizing Hand] and countless other divine abilities.

However...

This 'unlimited power' was only in theory. For example, there were countless people throughout human history who had learned Chinese characters, but almost none had been able to master it to the level of writing poems and stories that would be passed down for generations. The same principle was true for the [Nine Elements Annihilation]; it was extremely widespread amongst the powerful experts of the primordial chaos, but very, very few were actually able to develop truly outstanding divine tattoos based on it.

"Although it will be hard, based on the description that I saw, quite a few World Gods within the primordial chaos use and train in this technique," Ning mused to himself. "This is a key. A key that will allow me to potentially unlock and develop a truly dazzling divine ability."

"World God Northrest truly went to great lengths."

"The refining technique is one that can allow my power to rise nonstop, while the divine ability theoretically has no limit to its maximum combat power. The more talented one is, the more powerful this divine ability will become." Ning was extremely moved.

The silver-haired man was still standing outside the shrine. When Ning walked outside, the silver-haired man said with a smile, "Now that you have these two techniques, you are different from all other living creatures within the Three Realms."

"You knew?" Ning frowned.

"Master died, leaving all the matters within Moonfall Island to me to control. Of course I know," the silver-haired man said with a smile.

"Then I ask you...where is Vastheaven Palace?" Ning asked.

"I don't know." The silver-haired man shook his head.

"You don't know?" Ning was puzzled. "Was your master World God Northrest? Was he the creator of Undermoon Lake? Was he from

Vastheaven Palace?”

The silver-haired man nodded. “My master was indeed World God Northrest, and he was one of the top-tier World Gods within the primordial chaos. If it hadn’t been due to the three Wujiao Godbeasts joining together and trapping him, how could he have died? He was caught in a trap and surrounded, nearly dying in body and soul. Just a tiny bit of his soul managed to escape, and he plunged through one dangerous region after another, eventually ending up here. Because of all the dangerous regions he went through as he fled, not even he himself knew the path back to his original sect. This the reason why Master gave you a full chaos cycle in the lifeblood oath for you to find Vastheaven Palace. That’s a tremendous amount of time! If you aren’t able to find it in a full chaos cycle and end up being devoured by your oath, you have no one to blame but yourself.”

Ning was quite calm.”

A full chaos cycle!

That was the amount of time needed for an ordinary chaosworld to be born and then perish. It was countless trillions of years! He had only lived for a bit more than three hundred years. He felt no pressure at all.

“After Master reached this place, he used the remainder of his strength to build Undermoon Lake,” the silver-haired man said with a cold laugh. “You should be able to tell how powerful my master had been. Even the small amount of power he had left was equal to the amount of power an ordinary World God would have.”

“Yes.” Ning nodded.

He understood now. World God Northrest came from Vastheaven Palace and was a figure of incredible power...but disaster struck and he fled with heavy injuries. Unwilling to just die like that, he had created Undermoon Lake as a place to choose a suitable Empyrean God to send a message to his comrades for him.

“Fortunately, World God Northrest didn’t force me to swear an oath to take revenge for him,” Ning chuckled.

“You?” The silver-haired man shook his head and sneered, “The three Wujiao Godbeasts are three Godbeasts that were born from the primordial chaos with the power of Elder Gods. Later on, thanks to many fortuitous experiences over their countless years of roaming through the primordial chaos, they all reached the World God level. When they join together, they are a match for even my master; how could someone like you possibly kill them? All you need to do is deliver the message. When you do that, my master’s many friends will take revenge for him.”

Ning nodded. Fine, then. Northrest, the three Wujiao Godbeasts...all of that was very distant from him.

“Is Vastheaven Palace very powerful?” Ning asked curiously.

“It...should be.” The silver-haired man was slightly hesitant. “Master created me here, so I don’t know much of Vastheaven Palace. I trust that after you leave the Three Realms and begin to roam the endless primordial chaos, you should be able to find information regarding Vastheaven Palace.”

“Why is it that the written language of Undermoon Lake seems to be a bit different from the written language of the Three Realms?” Ning asked. He had noticed long ago that the language here was absolutely identical to the written language used by the chaos-kingdom of Pangaea.

“This is a common language that is used throughout the primordial chaos,” the silver-haired man explained.

Chapter 34: Departure? The Void Stairway

Ji Ning instantly understood. The chaos-kingdom of Pangaea was far more powerful than the Three Realms, and it also had much closer connections to the rest of the primordial chaos. It made sense that the language it used was the same language as was used throughout the rest of the primordial chaos. The Three Realms, by contrast, was rather segregated from the rest of the primordial chaos. It was only when the odd alien Outsider invaded that the Three Realms would gain some more information about the greater primordial chaos.

“Eh, forget it. Vastheaven Palace, Pangaea, World God Northrest, three Wujiao Godbeasts...all of that is way beyond my level for now. Even the lifeblood oath I swore only takes effect once I become an Elder God; only then would I have to leave the Three Realms.” Ning was quite calm.

In the end, he had gained great benefits from Undermoon Lake. The Three Realms was in the midst of a war, and Ning’s home, along with those he cared about, were all in the Three Realms. Nothing else mattered.

Becoming an Elder God was no easy feat either. Even becoming a True God would be very difficult, to say nothing of becoming an Elder God; all of that would definitely take an extremely long period of time.

“It has been countless years. Only two people have acquired these two techniques from Undermoon Lake; one was Jueming, and the other is you.” The silver-haired man looked at Ning. “Don’t disappoint Master.”

“For my own sake as well, I wouldn’t dare,” Ning said with a laugh.

“Let’s go. I send you away from Undermoon Lake.”

The silver-haired man immediately led the way forward. Ning let out a sigh of relief; he was afraid that the already-deceased World God Northrest had other schemes for him as well. In truth, Northrest was far too powerful, and his abilities were simply unfathomable. Most likely, even Mother Nuwa, back when she had first broken through to become a World God, wouldn’t necessarily have been a match for him. Ning

naturally was like an ant compared to the man, to be used or abused as needed. Fortunately, everything was going to be fine.

And of course, Mother Nuwa had entered the endless primordial chaos long ago to go adventuring; it was entirely possible that she had reached a shocking level of power.

Moonfall Island was truly beautiful. The silver-haired man led Ning through it until they arrived at the center of a grassy region. The center of the grassy region had a calm, curvy lake within it. The surface of the lake was so smooth that it looked like a giant piece of jade. When Ning and the silver-haired landed next to it, their landing caused a bit of wind which stirred up tiny, rippling waves on the surface of the lake, making it look even more mesmerizingly beautiful.

“Once you enter that little lake, you’ll leave Undermoon Lake,” the silver-haired man instructed.

“I’ll go in, then appear outside?” Ning pointed at the lake. When he had first arrived, he had smashed headfirst into the waters of Undermoon Lake, then appeared within the world of Undermoon Lake.

“Right. When you emerge, you’ll appear above the lake of water that is below the enormous moon.” The silver-haired man nodded, his gaze locked onto Ning. “Don’t forget your lifeblood oath.”

“Of course.” Ning chuckled and nodded.

Ning stared at the curved lake, his heart filled with joy. Finally...he was finally going to leave!

Senior apprentice-sister!

Wait for me!

Plop. Ning dove into beautiful pond, causing a series of ripples and waves to appear. Spacetime began to twist, teleporting Ning to a different place.

Ning could sense spacetime fluctuating around him as his surroundings became blurry to behold. Clearly, he was being transferred somewhere at

high speed. Suddenly, the area around him began to tremble slightly, causing Ning to feel rather puzzled. When he had been transferred to Undermoon Lake, the process had been very smooth and had lasted only a moment.

When his surroundings began to stabilize, Ning took a look around and was able to clearly see the environment.

“Eh?” He was completely surrounded the Void. Within the Void, there were a series of steps that seemed to be endless, leading him deeper up.

“W-where is this?” Ning was completely dazed. According to what the silver-haired man had said, he should’ve been brought back in the air above the waters of Undermoon Lake...but there wasn’t even a drop of the waters of Undermoon Lake here. All it had was the infinite Void and those seemingly endless stairs.

“Where exactly am I? Where have I been transferred to?” Ning was extremely cautious. It was easy to die of carelessness in a strange and unfamiliar place. “That silver-haired man didn’t lie to me, and I wasn’t able to fight back against him in Undermoon Lake; if he wanted me dead, it would’ve been easy for him to kill me.”

“If this was his doing, he could’ve simply said that he was going to send me to a special place. I wouldn’t have been able to fight back at all; there’s no need to lie to me.”

“In other words...that silver-haired man probably didn’t expect this either.”

Ning felt his heart lurch. “Is it...that World God Northrest died so long ago that holes appeared in his transmission tunnel, causing an error in my teleportation?”

Nothing in the world was truly eternal. Even chaosworlds would eventually wither and decay, and even World Gods like Northrest would one day be killed. It wasn’t impossible for his teleportation matrix to develop problems.

“Wasn’t I supposed to go back? Where have I been sent to?” Ning

calmed himself down, then first used heartforce followed by coresense to investigate this place. But it was all useless!!

“Those stairs...? If there’s a set of stairs here, this should be a specific, constructed location.” Ning carefully advanced up the stairs, following them upwards.

Ning moved incredibly quickly. Just a short while later, he saw an enormous stone tablet levitating atop the stairs ahead of him. The stone tablet was covered with countless carvings of sword-stances, and the sword-intent surging forth from each and every carving caused Ning’s heart to turn cold. The power of this sword-intent surpassed even the [Five Treasures].

“What terrifying sword-intent...there’s no way a True God or Daofather could’ve devised this. Could it be a World God? Was it World God Northrest?” Ning mused to himself.

Ning was in no rush to advance. He slowed down to take a careful look at the nameless sword-art before him.

If he was to leave now, who knew if he would ever be allowed back? He had to seize the opportunity to carefully inspect this sword-art. He had mastered the [Five Treasures] and stood at the very peak of skill in the Three Realms, but the Dao contained within this sword-art was simply too unfathomably powerful. Most likely, it was something that only a Chaos Immortal or World God could develop.

Ning ended up spending more than three months pondering that stone tablet.

“Urgh.” Ning’s face turned ashen, blood beginning to leak down his nostrils. The blood inside his body was bubbling and roiling about.

“I can’t keep studying it. It’s beyond my limits.” Ning was secretly shocked. “I wonder who left behind this sword-art? Was it World God Northrest? No matter who it was, this sword-art...it definitely surpasses any other sword-art of the Three Realms.”

In truth, the only World God the Three Realms had ever seen was

Mother Nuwa. She didn't use the sword, and so there was naturally no way that the Three Realms would have any techniques that could compare to this one.

"Time to go." Since he could no longer study it, Ning had no choice but to continue to advance upwards through the staircase through the Void. Just a short while later, he encountered yet another stone tablet. This one was also covered with sword-stances, and it also did not have a name to it. However, this sword-art was diametrically different from the previous one...and yet, its power wasn't one whit weaker.

Ning spent another three months carefully analyzing this technique, resulting his understanding of the sword rising even more.

"As the saying goes, beyond the heavens there is always an even greater Heaven."

"Anyone who believes the major powers of the Three Realms to be the most powerful figures in the universe is as narrow-sighted as a frog within a well. The endless primordial chaos has far, far too many powerful experts within it." Ning's skill in the sword was continuing to grow, but he was beginning to grow increasingly humble. He understood that there were many who were far more powerful than him. The creator of the sword-art on this tablet would be able to slay him with a single blow of the sword.

The staircase through the Void seemed endless.

Ning continued his path through the staircase. He actually encountered a total of ninety-eight stone tablets, each of which possessed a sword-art that was so unfathomable and profound that Ning's horizons were continually broadened. His skill in the sword had skyrocketed, and Ning had even gained some insights and ideas about reaching the fifth stage of swordforce.

The fifth stage of swordforce, Sword God. Ning had previously believed that it represented an unfathomably dense essence of emotions, and so when one reached this level, one's sword-art would gain a soul of its own. This was what Ning believed, and it was also what most of the major

powers of the Three Realms believed.

But now, after viewing the ninety-eight profound sword-arts left behind by this alien major power, Ning understood the truth.

Having emotions in one's sword-art was of secondary importance! For example, Ning's [Brightmoon] sword-art had originally possessed no emotional aura, but Ning had still been able to reach the fourth stage of swordforce, right?

The emotions simply aided the swordsman in becoming further intoxicated by the sword, allowing him to unleash even more of its potential.

In the end, what really mattered the most was understanding the sword and the essence of the sword! Of course strong emotions would be needed to upgrade one's swordforce from being 'sentient' to having an actual 'soul', giving it extraordinary power, but that was just a side effect. What really mattered was truly understanding the sword; upgrading one's understanding was the true foundation that needed to be laid.

"If I completely focused on infusing deep emotions into my sword-arts, I would've embarked on a wrong path." Cold sweat covered Ning's forehead. Only now, after seeing so many profound sword-arts, did he understand what his own path would be.

It was clear and obvious that the ninety-eight sword-arts atop the stone tablet had surpassed the fifth level of swordforce and reached an even higher and more unfathomable level.

"I've finally reached the end."

After viewing the ninety-eighth stone tablet, Ning saw an end to the stairway through the Void. At the end of the stairway lay an ancient shrine that looked like it had been completely formed from green jade. The shrine emanated an invisible aura of power and majesty.

Chapter 35: The End of the Road for World God Northrest

Ji Ning understood that the person who left behind this sort of sword-arts was powerful enough to, even in death, have complete control over whether or not Ning would live or die here. Thus, Ning didn't hesitate. He walked straight towards the jade shrine at the end of the stairways through the Void.

The jade shrine was as beautiful as beautiful could be.

The shrine's walls were made out of jade, possessing a semi-translucent quality about them. Just drawing near the walls of the jade shrine made Ning feel peaceful at heart.

"This shrine..." Ning swept it with his gaze as he entered. The shrine had almost nothing inside it, much like the last one.

At the very center of the shrine, there hovered a prayer mat that glowed with golden light. Far in front of the prayer mat lay an ancient, unadorned stone dais that had a slender sword atop it. The sword was three feet long but just one inch wide. This sword was completely blood-red in color, and its surface was covered with many cracks and scars. The cracks and scars covered every inch of the surface of the sword, making it look as though the sword might completely shatter at any moment. In fact, there were three particularly noticeable chunks missing from the edge of the sword.

This was a sword that was so badly damaged, it looked as though it was going to fall apart at any moment. But the sword...the sword was the source of the aura that filled the entire shrine! When Ning looked at the sword, he felt even more pressure than he did when he gazed upon Human Sovereign Fuxi. Without any question, this was a sword that vastly surpassed any Protocosmic spirit-treasure.

"A Chaos treasure?" Ning momentarily became quite excited, but moments later he frowned. "Even if it is a Chaos treasure, this sword...it's been damaged to an incredible extent."

After inspecting the place for a long time, Ning noticed that the prayer mat of golden light was woven from a Chaos ingredient known as winterheart grass. Similar types of prayer mats existed in the Three Realms, and those who sat upon it would feel their hearts becalmed. But in terms of price, it was merely comparable to a Protocosmic spirit-treasure. To someone like Ning, who had all the treasures of Prisonworld 17 in his hands, it really wasn't that important.

"This is a mysterious place. It has a long staircase leading through the Void with a shrine at the end of it, and the shrine seems built to house and venerate a sword that's almost been destroyed." Ning was secretly puzzled.

The only items in the entire shrine were the prayer mat, the stone dais, and the divine sword. Neither the prayer mat nor the stone dais were particular special. Although the sword had an utterly shocking aura, it was unspeakably damaged.

As Ning was still pondering how to further investigate this shrine with care, a ripple of power suddenly flew out from the sword, landed on the ground, and transformed into a golden-armored female general. The golden armor was covered with many blood-colored patterns.

"Empyrean God Darknorth...Ji Ning?" The golden-armored warlady looked at Ning and spoke out.

"You are...?" Ning instantly understood. Since this person knew his name, she was probably the one who arranged for him to come here.

"I am the sword-spirit of 'Violetjewel', the divine sword that was wielded by World God Northrest." The golden-armored warlady pointed at the tattered-looking sword. "That's Violetjewel right there. You may address me as 'sword-spirit'."

This golden-armored woman was just the spirit of the treasure.

"You should have been sent out of Undermoon Lake, but I arranged for you to be led here instead," the warlady said.

"What is this place?" Ning asked.

“This is still Undermoon Lake,” the golden-armored warlady said. “However, it is an independent, stand-alone dimension within Undermoon Lake. Before you entered, no one aside from myself knew that it existed.”

Ning was puzzled. “Are you saying that Reverend Jueming wasn’t allowed in here either?”

“Right. You are the only living person who has entered since Master died,” the warlady said.

“Then why did you bring me in here?” Ning was growing increasingly puzzled.

“Because of the [Five Treasures] sword-art,” the warlady said.

“The [Five Treasures]?” Ning was startled. “Are you keeping a constant watch on the actions of the Empyrean Gods within Undermoon Lake? Is that how you learned of the [Five Treasures]?”

The golden-armored warlady revealed a hint of a smile. This caused Ning to feel surprised and even a bit dazzled. Previously, she had maintained an emotionless look on her face. Her smile, however, was like the blooming of a flower.

“It was my master who created the [Five Treasures]. How could I not know of it?” The smile on the warlady’s face had a hint of pride to it.

“Your master created it?” Ning was stunned. Right. Although Daofather Fujū had claimed to others in the Three Realms that he was the one to create it, after soulscouring the memories of the prisoners of Prisonworld 17, Ning had come to understand how truly impressive it was for a sword-art to exceed the limits of the Heavenly Daos. It definitely wasn’t something that the likes of a Daofather such as Fujū would’ve been able to create. So...it had actually been created by World God Northrest.

However, Ning was puzzled as well. “Even prior to ‘developing’ the [Five Treasures], Daofather Fujū had been a top-tier Daofather. Given his power and ability, why would he need to lie? Did he lie to keep some sort of secret hidden?”

“Do you know Daofather Fujū?” Ning asked.

Daofather Fujū's death was a mystery. Countless major powers in the Three Realms had wished to investigate it and understand it, but none had been able to discover anything.

"Daofather Fujū?" The golden-armored warlady blinked. She then looked at Ning with a smile on her face that wasn't really a smile. "Of course. After you listen to what I say, you'll understand."

"Speak." Ning nodded.

"Many years ago, the shattered remnants of my master's soul borrowed from the power of Violetjewel in order to frantically flee, eventually arriving within your Three Realms. Upon reaching this place, he was no longer able to flee any further. Oh; back then, your 'Three Realms' didn't exist. It was still the Primordial Era, so the world was the Pangu Chaosworld back then," the warlady said.

"Fortunately, Master had fled so frantically that those three Wujiao Godbeasts were unable to catch up to him. Upon arriving, Master could sense that there was an Elder God in the Three Realms who could potentially pose a threat to him...the person you all refer to as Mother Nuwa! Although back then she was still just an Elder God, she had already reached the very peak of power possible for an Elder God. She was far more powerful than the other Elder Gods back during the Primordial Era, so powerful that even Master felt a faint sense of danger emanating from her. If they really were to go all-out in a fight...it's hard to say if he would've been able to slay Nuwa, but he himself definitely would've died."

Ning continued to listen with curiosity.

"If Master was at full power, he wouldn't have worried about Nuwa at all, of course. But back then, he had only a tiny shred of his soul left! Although he would still be able to unleash the power of a World God, he wouldn't be able to sustain it for long; naturally, he didn't wish to take the risk of battling Nuwa. Thus, Master created this world, Undermoon Lake, within the vast primordial chaos."

The golden-armored warlady continued, "Master's injuries were simply too heavy. His divine body had completely crumbled apart, and he had

only a shred of his soul left. Even his truesoul was beginning to break apart. The only thing Master could do was to slow the rate at which his truesoul was disintegrating, because once it completely broke apart he would've died."

"Master established Undermoon Lake for the purpose of enticing Empyrean Gods to come to this place. He didn't want to let those three Godbeasts continue to live carefree lives, to let them get away with what they had done. Thus, he wanted to arrange for someone to go deliver a message to Vastheaven Palace."

"Master wasn't going to be able to live long enough to deliver the message himself. He had to train someone else, an Empyrean God, to do it for him."

"Eventually, one day...Daofather Fuju wandered into the primordial chaos and was discovered by my master. And so...my master took possession of his body," the golden-armored warlady said.

Ning's eyes widened as he stared at her.

"P-possessed?" He was completely stunned.

"Right." The golden-armored warlady nodded. "After establishing Undermoon Lake, Master's top priority was slowing the speed at which his truesoul decayed, or perhaps even stop and reverse the process! Master still wanted to live, after all, and so he came up with a method to use the physical body to nourish the truesoul. Upon wandering the primordial chaos, he just so happened to run into Daofather Fuju."

"Master wouldn't have been confident in his chances of possessing Nuwa, but Daofather Fuju...he was nothing more than an ordinary Daofather. Master was naturally able to possess him with ease."

"After possessing him, Master entered the Pangu Chaosworld. He revealed just a bit of his power, showing off fifth-stage swordforce, resulting in his status within the Pangu Chaosworld skyrocketing," the golden-armored warlady explained.

Ning felt a twinge of fear. So even back during the Primordial Era,

Daofather Fujū had been possessed.

“Master had no desire to teach any students; all he cared about was coming up with a way that would halt the collapse of his truesoul, and perhaps even heal it. But...no matter what he tried, no matter how much effort he expended, he was unable to stop his truesoul from crumbling. He was only able to rely on the energy of his fleshly body to slow the rate of decay. Thus, during the war that destroyed the Primordial Era, Master didn't really try all that hard, precisely because he didn't want to get into a serious fight with tough experts like the Lord of All Things, the Lord of the Demonheart, or the Lord of All Fiends. If he did, he would've died even faster.”

Finally, Ning understood.

No wonder. No wonder Daofather Fujū was the undisputed number one Sword Immortal of the Three Realms, but was quite ineffective in teaching disciples, producing not even a single powerful student. By contrast, the likes of Old Man Yuan and Daofather Subhuti had multiple students who became Daofathers. So it was all because World God Northrest had no real interest in teaching disciples at all.

“The Primordial Era ended. The Three Realms were born.” The golden-armored warlady continued. “Master finally gave up. He understood that there was no way he could prevent his truesoul from disintegrating. And so, prior to his death, he made the final arrangements.”

“He left behind five mountain peaks within Sword Immortal world, then left behind the complete [Five Treasures] within those mountain peaks, all for the sake of training a successor, someone who could go and send a message to Vastheaven Palace for him, or perhaps even take revenge on his behalf,” the golden-armored warlady said. “Master was a Fiendgod refiner, and so he required that his successor be a Fiendgod refiner as well. Back then, Master didn't really care if his successor was an Empyrean God or a True God. Any Fiendgod refiner who mastered the [Five Treasures] would be allowed into the fifth mountain...and in truth, the so-called ‘legacy’ within the fifth mountain was actually a spatial corridor that led to this place.”

Ning was stunned. So the fifth mountain led to this place?

“Master understood that few-to-no Empyrean Gods who were truly, outstandingly talented would elect to enter Undermoon Lake, which was why he left behind the fifth mountain and allowed all of the geniuses of the Three Realms to view it,” the golden-armored warlady said. “Master wished to find a good successor.”

“He left behind the [Five Treasures] and the five mountains, then left. All by himself, he entered the primordial chaos to wait for death to come to him. His truesoul completed its disintegration...and Master died a true death.”

Ning couldn't help but sigh upon hearing this. An almighty World God had struggled and fled, unwilling to give up...but in the end, there had been nothing he could do. And so, he had left behind the [Five Treasures] and other things, then peacefully went to wait for death to descend.

“No wonder Daofather Fujū's body was discovered in the primordial chaos, but it was impossible to tell how or why he had died.” Ning sighed. Such a powerful figure had died, just like that...and Fujū himself had been possessed during the Primordial Era.

This was indeed a mystery that was impossible for the Three Realms to solve.

If this golden-armored warlady hadn't exposed it all, who would've found out? Not even Mother Nuwa would've been able to find out.

“And so, after countless years...you've arrived.” The golden-armored warlady looked at Ning.

Chapter 36: Heartseep Technique

Ji Ning felt a surge of joy in his heart.

World God Northrest had spent a tremendous amount of effort to train a proper successor. The things he had prepared for this successor would no doubt be much better than the items he had left behind on Moonfall Island.

“The most precious item within all of Undermoon Lake is the item which master was able to rely upon in order to escape, despite being surrounded, assaulted, and wounded so badly that only a shred of his soul remained. It is this sword.” The golden-armored warlady pointed at the slender, terribly damaged blood-colored sword. Ning was stunned; this was it? This broken-looking sword?

Even if it was powerful in the past, it was completely ruined now.

“Don’t underestimate it. Don’t be deceived by its bad condition.” The golden-armored warlady sneered, “Not all the treasures in your Three Realms combined would be as valuable as this ‘badly damaged sword’ in front of you.”

Ning was shocked. Not even all the treasures in the Three Realms combined?

“The most precious thing within your Three Realms is its ‘Worldcore’, which will only manifest after the Three Realms is destroyed. But even the Worldcore is vastly inferior in value to this sword.” The golden-armored warlady let out a sigh. “Even in as bad condition as it currently is, it’s far beyond the limits of your imagination.”

“It’s that powerful?” Ning was shocked.

“Powerful?” The warlady laughed coldly, “World Gods and Chaos Immortals are all extremely powerful. They rove throughout the primordial chaos, and to them, it’s not that hard to use a technique to hasten the destruction of a chaosworld and then extract the Worldcore from it.”

Ning nodded.

World Gods and Chaos Immortals did indeed have the power to destroy a chaosworld. For example, the great war of the Primordial Era had been instigated by the Lord of All Things, but if it had been instigated by a World God, Mother Nuwa probably wouldn't have even had the chance to make a breakthrough. Everyone would've been effortlessly dominated.

"Although Worldcores are valuable treasures to Chaos Immortals and World Gods, they can acquire them with a bit of effort. But this sword..." The golden-armored warlady let out a sigh. "It's enough to drive any World God mad with lust, to the point of risking their own lives for it. Master had to rely on the help of many friends from Vastheaven Palace, combined with his own personal power, in order to acquire it. For the sake of this sword, Master paid an indescribable price...but it was all worth it, because in the end he acquired this sword, Violetjewel."

"It's that precious?" Ning stared at the badly damaged sword, extremely puzzled. "What is the story behind it? You should know, right?"

"I do not." The golden-armored warlady shook her head, a bit embarrassed. "When Violetjewel carried Master's soul-sliver with it as it fled, it was so badly damaged that even its original sword-spirit was destroyed. Master ended up placing Violetjewel within Undermoon Lake. Once the sword was given some time to settle down and stabilize, it was able to slowly give birth to a new spirit - me."

Ning now understood. It made sense. For example, the master of a treasure could wipe out its treasure-spirit and then allow a new treasure-spirit to be born.

"However, before he died, Master told me everything that he could. All the necessary arrangements were made." The golden-armored warlady looked at Ning.

"Judging from what you are saying...this sword should be even more powerful than a Chaos treasure?" Ning asked.

"Powerful?" The golden-armored warlady said, "The so-called 'Chaos treasures' of your Three Realms are generally meant for Elder Gods and

Ancestral Immortals. World Gods could fight barehanded and have power equivalent to that of a Chaos treasure! They use far more powerful weapons. As for this sword...even amongst the weapons used by World Gods and Chaos Immortals, it is one of the absolute best of weapons.”

Ning frowned. “If that’s the case, would I even be capable of binding it?”

After soulscouring the memories of the prisoners of Pangaea, Ning had learned a few things. In Pangaea, True Gods and True Immortals would generally use Protocosmic spirit-treasures, while Elder Gods and Ancestral Immortals used Chaos treasures. As for the King of Pangaea, he supposedly used an even more terrifyingly powerful treasure which could only be bound by someone who was at least at the Elder God or Ancestral Immortal level of power.

As for this tattered-looking sword...if it was one of the absolute best weapons that could be used by World Gods and Chaos Immortals, how could a mere Empyrean God/True Immortal like Ning possibly bind it?

“Generally speaking, one has to have the power of a World God to bind this weapon.” The golden-armored woman warlady at Ning. “However, since Master left this sword for you, he must have done it for a reason. In Vastheaven Palace, there is a certain unique and secret binding technique that is recorded within the [Eight Directions Secret Scroll]. Although the records were casually written down, they described something that is extraordinarily marvelous. This technique is known as the ‘Heartseep’ technique. Through using the ‘Heartseep’ technique, you can bind this sword. Once you do, you’ll be able to retract its aura and change its appearance and coloration. Otherwise, everyone would be able to tell at a glance how extraordinary this weapon is.”

Ning nodded. The aura of this badly damaged sword was even more terrifying than Human Sovereign Fuxi’s aura. Its power would indeed be obvious to anyone.

Ordinary Pure Yang treasures and Protocosmic spirit-treasures had auras of their own, but after they were bound the auras could be suppressed, making them seem like normal weapons.

“This is the Heartseep technique.” The golden-armored warlady waved her hand, causing a bamboo scroll to appear in midair before her.

“That’s like how we do it in the Three Realms.” Ning chuckled. The Pangaea chaos-kingdom and the Three Realms recorded down techniques in differing manners. After World God Northrest had possessed Daofather Fujū, he had chosen to do as they did in the Three Realms and recorded techniques down within bamboo scrolls.

Ning accepted it in a very practiced manner, then sent his coresense into it.

A large amount of information began to flood into his mind, but after just two breaths worth of time, it came to an end. This was a fairly simple technique, but despite its simplicity, it would be hard for even World Gods or Chaos Immortals to intentionally devise an idea like it. This technique...the principles behind it were quite interesting.

When royal figures died on Earth during the early ages, they would have jade treasures buried with them. Because those treasures would be covered in dirt and mud for hundreds or thousands of years, once they were excavated they would still be imprinted with some dirt or mud which would have seeped into the jade itself.

It wouldn’t be very practical to come up with an idea to actively ‘seep’ dirt and mud into jade on Earth unless one used extremely high-tech methods, akin to how World Gods and Chaos Immortals would be able to use their tremendous power to forcibly bind this sword. However, given a long enough period of time, just keeping jade in constant contact with mud would eventually cause the mud to ‘seep’ into the jade. This was the essence of the ‘Heartseep’ technique.

“What?” Ning’s face changed. “It needs that long? A thousand years?”

“Is a thousand years really that long?” The golden-armored warlady looked towards Ning, puzzled. “For you, an Empyrean God and a True Immortal, to spend a mere thousand years binding a priceless treasure like this and complain about how long it takes...? This technique is already quite formidable, and the amount of time is already quite short.”

Ning grew frantic. He didn't have the time needed to slowly bind the treasure. The outside world had already descended into a state of calamity, and he had already spent more than a century in Undermoon Lake. He naturally wanted to leave as soon as possible.

"Can I take this sword back with me? Can I slowly bind it in the outside world?" Ning asked.

The golden-armored warlady shook her head. "You can try. If you can move it, go ahead."

"Oh?" Puzzled, Ning immediately walked forward and reached out to grab the terribly damaged sword. Since the warlady wasn't going to stop him, this shouldn't prove dangerous.

Boom!

As soon as Ning's palm descended upon the sword, an invisible burst of power blasted out, knocking Ning backwards and sending him flying away like a meteor.

A short while later, he flew back.

"B-but..." As Ning once more walked into the jade shrine, he stared in astonishment at the badly damaged sword. It clearly was in terrible shape, but it still possessed incredible power.

"If you take it out without binding it, once the Elder Gods and Ancestral Immortals of the Three Realms notice it you'll be doomed." The golden-armored warlady shook her head. "I heard you say in Undermoon Lake that the Three Realms has entered a state of war between two main allied camps? If you go out and end up losing that treasure to the major powers of the Seamless Gate, you'll become a sinner in the eyes of all your allies."

Ning understood what she was saying...but was he really going to be trapped here for a thousand years?

"You only have two clones here." The golden-armored warlady chuckled. "Two absolutely identical clones. Techniques like these always produce more than just two, right? I imagine you have other clones in the outside world at all. If that's really the case, then they should be able to deal with

any emergent situations in the outside world.”

Indeed. In the outside world, Ning had sixteen ‘true bodies’ and eighteen Primaltwin bodies.

“In addition...this sword has suffered tremendous damage. Just look at it; it’s almost fallen apart. Only its energy source remains undamaged. It shouldn’t be that hard to bind it; five hundred years if you are fast, a thousand years if you are slow.” The golden-armored warlady explained, “Oh, right; aside from this treasure, Master has left behind other techniques for you to receive. He spent tremendous effort recording them all down for you.”

As she spoke, the warlady waved her hand. Instantly, one bamboo scroll after another began to materialize in the air, coming together to form a small mountain of scrolls!

“Some of his techniques could not be transmitted, due to the rules of Vastheaven Palace. The others, the ones that he was permitted to teach, are all here.” The golden-armored warlady pointed towards the small mountain of bamboo scrolls.

Chapter 37: The Sole True Body

“One of your clones can focus on using the Heartseep technique to bind the sword while the other can begin the slow process of memorizing all these techniques,” the golden-armored warlady suggested.

Ji Ning nodded.

Whoosh. Whoosh.

Two white-robed youths appeared within the jade shrine. One stood silently in front of the mountain of bamboo scrolls, with every single scroll emanating ripples of power. The other walked next to the divine sword, moved the prayer mat closer to it, then sat down by himself and quietly began to use the Heartseep technique.

Using the Heartseep technique was quite simple, but there was one prerequisite; one had to have a basic understanding of heartforce!

World God Northrest knew for certain that his chosen successor would have a basic understanding of heartforce. It must be understood that most of the True Gods and Daofathers of the Three Realms had reached the second or third stages of heartforce. Truly powerful experts all generally had at least some mastery of heartforce. Anyone capable of mastering the [Five Treasures] would definitely have some level of understanding of heartforce.

As noted by the instructions included with the Heartseep technique, heartforce was ephemeral and formless, yet extraordinarily marvelous and effective. The Heartseep technique, in and of itself, was a special way of applying heartforce.

Ning’s heartforce had reached the fourth level. Based on his calculations, he would need a thousand years to bind the sword. If his heartforce had only been on the first or second level, the amount of time needed would’ve been even greater.

Ning’s invisible heartforce seeped into the body of the Violetjewel sword. It entered the sword effortlessly.

Ning's heartforce could sense that within Violetjewel, there was a blurry region that was filled with countless cracks and scars. Clearly, Violetjewel had been damaged tremendously. Within the blurry region, there was a complex, octahedral crystalline structure. Every single face of the octahedral crystal was covered with extremely complicated runes. The runes were far, far more complicated than anything Ning had ever encountered, even the nine chaos seals.

The surface of the octahedral crystal was covered with a layer of flowing light that prevented Ning's heartforce from penetrating through it in the slightest, but he was still able to sense the unearthly power that lay hidden within it.

This was the power source of the Violetjewel sword! The most central core of it!

So long as the core remained intact, even if the entire physical sword was destroyed, it could one day be repaired.

"Time to begin." Ning's heartforce was like an invisible hand within the sword. It began to form countless dots of starlight, all of which joined together to form slender threads. The many starlight threads swirled around the octahedral crystal, beginning to 'seep' into it as instructed by the Heartseep technique.

Two white-robed youths; one seated atop a prayer mat next to the sword on the stone dais, the other standing in front of a mountain of bamboo scrolls.

Time flowed on nonstop. In the blink of an eye, four months passed.

"I've finally finished memorizing them all." Ning was finally able to relax. Although these powerful techniques included the ninety-eight sword arts on the stone tablets, other powerful sword-arts, Fiendgod Body Refining techniques, Ki Refining techniques, special secret arts, and powerful divine abilities...Ning was still somewhat disappointed.

These techniques would all be of some use to him after he became very powerful, upon reaching the Elder God or even World God levels. But as for right now? They were of no use at all in improving his current level of

power.

He had been hoping that he would be able to find a way to upgrade his second-tier Jindan into a first-tier Jindan. But alas...he had hoped in vain. There was nothing.

“Disappointed?” The golden-armored warlady smirked at him.

Ning couldn't be bothered to lie to a treasure-spirit. He nodded. “A bit. The Three Realms are in a state of war right now, after all. If it wasn't for the war, I wouldn't be in a rush to increase my level of power, but the war has already arrived. None of these techniques can help me increase my power within a short period of time. I was hoping that I would be able to improve slightly.”

“I knew you'd be in a rush.” The golden-armored warlady revealed a slightly smug look on her face. “When I saw that look on your face when you heard how long it would take to bind the sword, I understood how frantic you were to leave. Thus...I played a little joke on you.”

“Joke?” Ning was stunned.

“The three most important techniques aren't actually in any of those bamboo scrolls.” The golden-armored warlady pointed at the mountain of scrolls. Ning's eyes instantly lit up.

“Look.” She pointed at the nearby walls of the jade shrine. Instantly, the semi-translucent walls became filled with various diagrams as countless images of sword-stances appeared. With the restrictive spell removed, the aura of the sword-intent within the stances came surging outwards, causing Ning to shudder uncontrollably.

“Master was a World God of the sword. This is the most powerful technique Master acquired while wandering the endless primordial chaos, a nameless sword-art that has utterly Heaven-shaking power. The reason why Master stood amongst the most top-tier of World Gods was primarily due to this sword-art,” the golden-armored warlady said. “Master wrote down everything he had memorized about the sword-art here.”

Ning nodded.

“The ninety-eight sword-arts on the stone tablets outside were developed by Master after he gained insight into this nameless sword-art. After you master them, you can begin to study the nameless sword-art,” the warlady said.

“Now look at this.” Another stone tablet suddenly appeared in her hands.

“This is the ‘talisman of welcome’ which Master personally forged.” The golden-armored warlady looked at Ning. “After you bind it, it will become part of you. Once you die, the talisman will shatter.”

“Talisman of welcome?” Ning was puzzled.

“Right. In the endless primordial chaos, there are countless Elder Gods, Ancestral Immortals, and even World Gods who would desperately desire to acquire this talisman,” the golden-armored warlady said. “According to what Master said, Vastheaven Palace is a very powerful organization within the primordial chaos, and all of the experts within it refer to each other as brothers; there’s no such thing as ‘masters’ or ‘disciples’ in their ranks. Any and every member of Vastheaven Palace is a brother to the others.”

“If you want to join Vastheaven Palace, you have to be welcomed in by a formal member of Vastheaven Palace.” The golden-armored warlady explained, “At Vastheaven Palace, there is a ‘Welcomer’ who is perennially responsible for welcoming new members. If any outsiders wish to join Vastheaven Palace, they have to pass the many tests which the Welcomer gives, at which point they will be welcomed into Vastheaven Palace.”

“Aside from this option!”

“Every formal member of Vastheaven Palace is permitted to welcome a single new member into their ranks.” The golden-armored warlady continued, “World God Northrest never welcomed any other experts into the palace. Before dying, he fashioned this ‘talisman of welcome’ for your sake, which means that so long as you can reach the Elder God or Ancestral Immortal level, you will be qualified to join Vastheaven Palace.”

Upon hearing this, Ning remained quite calm, although he did of course feel anticipation.

Vastheaven Palace?

World God Northrest had fled so frantically that even he himself didn't know the way back. Thus, he had given Ning a full chaos cycle to locate Vastheaven Palace. Who knew where the place even was?

"The nameless sword-art and the talisman of welcome are both extremely important." The golden-armored warlady looked at Ning. "There was a scroll within that pile over there that would be quite useful for you, but I intentionally took it out and kept it from you."

"Ah?!" Ning was stunned.

"Take a look." The golden-armored warlady waved her hand, producing yet another bamboo scroll. "I know that you have a body-duplicating technique, so I felt certain that this bamboo scroll would be very useful to you. Heh heh...I intentionally made sure it was the last one you see."

Ning quickly accepted the scroll.

The nameless sword-art? He would have to master the other ninety-eight sword-arts before he could study in it. That was not going to happen for a long, long time.

The talisman of welcome from Vastheaven Palace? That wouldn't matter for an even longer period of time.

"This is the last scroll." Ning accepted it, then immediately sent his coresense into it. Instantly, information began to flood towards him as a technique entered his mind.

"The 'One True Body' technique?" Ning murmured to himself.

This was a secret art!

By relying on the [One True Body] technique, bodies that all came from the same source could be merged together into one! The underlying principle of this technique was based off the rationale that, since all bodies and clones stemmed from the same source, they all had hidden

connections that could be used to join them together again. Thus, a major power in the primordial chaos ended up creating this technique, the [One True Body].

The third stage of the [Taowu Eighteen Fiendgods] allowed for its eighteen clones to merge into one, but also allowed it to split apart again.

As for the [One True Body] secret art, it could merge together separate clones to form a 'true body', but upon doing so it would no longer be able to split the clones apart again!

This, compared to the [Taowu Eighteen Fiendgods], was its weakness; its inability to split up again. However, [One True Body] could be used without any material requirements.

"It is useful to you, yes?" The golden-armored warlady laughed as she spoke. In the future, she would follow Ning, and so she naturally felt intrinsically friendly towards him.

"Yes." Ning nodded.

After his bodies merged together, they wouldn't be able to split apart again...but why would he even need to split them apart? It was enough for his power to increase by an explosive amount!

When all his clones merged together, the power of his soul, his ki, his divine power, his heartforce, and his divine body would all skyrocket. If him possessing a second-tier Jindan made him a 'half-step Daofather', once he merged all of his clones together he would become equivalent to an actual Daofather.

This wasn't just useful; this was exactly what he needed!

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Life in this standalone dimension was quite peaceful. One of Ning's bodies focused on binding the extraordinarily powerful sword, while the other spent every single day meditating on the sword-arts recorded on the ninety-eight stone tablets. The sword-arts recorded into the bamboo scrolls were nothing more than images, after all, whereas the sword-arts left behind on the stone tablets had been personally carved into them by

World God Northrest. They were filled with his boundless intent, making it so that meditating on them was many tens of times easier.

One year passed. Ten years. A hundred years...

Ning's sword-arts and cultivation base began to silently rise. For someone like Ning who had already mastered the [Five Treasures], it was entirely possible to meditate on these sword-arts left behind by a powerful World God. Although he wouldn't be able to forcibly master all of them, he was still able to meditate on them one part at a time. And as time went on, he began to understand more and more.

This was one of the things which Ning would rely on in the future to truly roam the Three Realms with his sword-arts.

But as Ning lived this peaceful, fulfilling life of cultivation in this standalone region, the Three Realms...had been thrust into a state of complete and utter turmoil!

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